



**The
TIDE of FORTUNE**

William Child

THE TIDE OF FORTUNE

What the story is about :

This exciting story of Dicon Lovering, one of the great Devon ship-owning family, and his nephew, Jeremy Wainwright (the central figures of 'The Wake of Rebellion'), is set for the most part in New England of 1687.

On the voyage to Boston aboard 'The Anne'—one of the Lovering vessels—they rescue from a small boat a man named Challoner who had escaped when his ship was attacked by The Duke, a notorious pirate. When he has been nursed back to health, Challoner accompanies Dicon and Jeremy—together with the faithful William Gammon, bosun of 'The Anne'—on their journey to Perfect Peace, a Puritan settlement seventy miles west of Boston. There is a mystery about Perfect Peace, which Dicon and Jeremy are determined to solve : the previous year a beautiful red-haired lady landed in Boston with her maid and was taken to Perfect Peace, never to be heard of since ; but every six months one precious stone of great value is brought from the settlement to be traded for weapons of war.

In discovering the secret of Perfect Peace, Dicon and Jeremy are plunged into an enthralling adventure, and it is not until the voyage home that the greatest mystery of all is solved.

By the same author

THE WAKE OF REBELLION

William Child

THE TIDE OF
FORTUNE



FREDERICK WARNE AND CO. LTD.
LONDON AND NEW YORK

FREDERICK WARNE & CO. LTD
London

FOR
CHRISTOPHER JOHN MILTON

Printed in Great Britain

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I A STRANGE SURVIVOR	7
II CHALLONER'S STORY	21
III PERIL ON THE SEA	33
IV END OF 'THE DUCHESS'	44
V ARRIVAL IN BOSTON	53
VI THE MYSTERY OF THE RED-HAIRED LADY	62
VII DEPARTURE FROM BOSTON	72
VIII PERFECT PEACE	86
IX A CHANCE ENCOUNTER	100
X INVITATION TO A FEAST	112
XI WILLIAM SOLVES THE MYSTERY	123
XII JEREMY MAKES A FRIEND	133
XIII DICON PLAYS HIS PART	145
XIV THE FRIENDLINESS OF WILLIAM	158
XV THE FRUITS OF FRIENDLINESS	165
XVI CHALLONER LEARNS A LESSON	173
XVII AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSAL	187
XVIII CHALLONER SHOWS HIS HAND	197
XIX TREACHERY !	210
XX THE SIEGE OF PERFECT PEACE	214
XXI WILLIAM'S PLAN	224
XXII ABOARD 'THE ANNE' AGAIN	236
XXIII HOMEWARD BOUND	246

CHAPTER I

A STRANGE SURVIVOR

THREE days out of Bridgetown, Barbados, the wind had suddenly dropped so that the tall ship,

The Anne', under full canvas to catch what little wind there was, ploughed a sea furrow which left but a puny wake. A capful of wind set the sails flapping for a fleeting moment and then died.

Captain John Coombe, the Ship Master, cocked a weather eye to the heavens and shrugged his shoulders resignedly. No clouds broke the flat blue of the sky, and the darker blue of the sea rippled no more than an English river on a warm day in June.

Dicon Lovering leaned against the poop rail and smiled lazily. He was the only son of Thomas Lovering, Head of the House of Lovering, Bankers and Merchant Venturers of Langley Barton, Devon, and owner of 'The Anne' and many other fine vessels.

His nephew, fifteen-year-old Jeremy Wainwright, who leaned beside him, gazing down into the sea, raised his head and smiled in return. "You know, Uncle," he said, "though we make poor progress I am well content."

"To be sure, lad," replied Dicon banteringly, "after our somewhat arduous existence as convict rebels sold into slavery, the victuals of 'The Anne

the comfort of her bunks, not to mention our freedom of action and, of course, the fresh sea breezes—if we had them—are not to be despised. So the longer our voyage the better we savour our blessings, say I.”

And for those sentiments Dicon had every justification, for only three days before he and his nephew had been convict slaves on a Barbados plantation whence, though innocent, they had been transported on being sentenced for treason after the Monmouth Rebellion.

For six months their life had been indeed ‘arduous’, but when they had discovered that their owner, Mister Rutherford, was a man to whose aid they had once gone in London, when he was being attacked by footpads, things became considerably better. Mister Rutherford had another reason to be grateful, for Jeremy had saved his daughter, Jennifer, from being savaged by a mad hound when she was thrown from her pony; so Jeremy was appointed her escort when out riding—a very pleasant duty!

Then ‘The Anne’—greatest of the Lovering vessels—had sailed into Bridgetown Harbour, and Dicon and Jeremy had seized the opportunity to escape: with the full approval of Mister Rutherford.

Now they were once again at sea on their way to Boston, New England, ‘The Anne’s’ first port of call. Soon they would return to England

where Jeremy could live peacefully with his parents, who had fled to Holland on being wrongfully accused of treason. Dicon was sure that once the true facts of their innocence were known, pardon would be obtained.

Dicon turned to Captain Coombe. "But I know one who chafes at the bit like any thoroughbred eager for the chase. What say you, John?"

Captain John Coombe shook his head. "Aye, Dicon, I'm none too pleased. I'm a Devon man with a proper appreciation of the value of money, and time means money. We're losing time and therefore money. I tell you this too, before nightfall we're like to be becalmed and I've known a ship becalmed in the Carib seas for more than three weeks!"

"Um," said Dicon thoughtfully, "that is different."

Dicon Lovering treated Captain Coombe's every given opinion upon the ways of sea and ships with the profound respect it deserved. In his middle fifties, and more than twice Dicon's own age, he had sailed the seas for forty years and little in his vast experience had ever been forgotten.

"However," said Captain Coombe, "there is one member of our crew who is doubtless finding our enforced idleness more irksome than I!"

He jerked his thumb downwards to the main deck.

Dicon and Jeremy grinned.

A man on hands and knees, sweating as he toiled, scrubbed industriously at a spotlessly clean deck while half a dozen seamen stood by and gave unnecessary, and facetious, advice.

But it was not the unrequested advice that gave the scrubber of decks the energy to work with such will. It was the presence of a mighty, dark-browed man, well nigh as broad as he was long, which provided the driving force.

This man was William Gammon, Bosun of 'The Anne', and the deck-scrubber was Joseph Dodson, a most unwilling member of the crew, who had been an overseer on the plantation in Barbados where he had treated the convict rebel slaves in his charge with appalling brutality. It was for that reason he now found himself deck-scrubbing.

Dicon and Jeremy had arranged for Joseph Dodson to be invited to visit 'The Anne' while she lay at anchor at Bridgetown Harbour, and—let it be admitted—there was nothing accidental about her putting to sea before he was able to go ashore. For they had seen so much ill-treatment meted out to the slaves by Dodson, that Dicon had decided a spell at sea might be indeed good for the ex-overseer's soul.

And William Gammon had shown no reluctance to act as mentor, and to take Dodson under his wing.

Joseph Dodson feared William Gammon mightily, though had he known, he need not have done so. William's threats of keel hauling, hanging at the yardarm, the application of the rope's end to that part of the overseer's anatomy where it would hurt most, were but words. For no kinder-hearted man, none gentler despite his girth and bulging muscles, ever left a Devon village for the high seas than William Gammon.

But Joseph Dodson was not to know this. He only knew from what he had gathered from members of the crew—and it was the truth no less—that William Gammon was a “fair terror” in battle and “them as got in the way o' his cutlash 'adn't got for to worry about tomorrow's supper”.

“Now then, y' lubber,” growled William, “get down to it, can't 'ee! Y' b'aint puttin' more into it than a maiden polishin' the buckles of 'er Sunday shoes. Get on with it. Put y'r back into it, or maybe a taste of the rope's end 'll liven 'ee up. An' y'll be goin' up aloft arter this. Y' b'ain't likely to fall t'day seein' as 'tis calm. Though, all the same, I've known chaps as 'ave a-fallen. But if so be y' does—make it so y' falls into the sea. If y' falls on the deck it makes a proper mess it does. 'Orrid work it'd be scrapin' up what was you. If y' falls in the sea, maybe y'd be saved if the fishes didn't get 'ee first. Ain't that right, me lads?”

The seamen standing by nodded and said " Ahr " except one who said dolefully : " 'Tain't much of a chance, Bosun. Ravenous beasts, sharks. D'ye mind that chap as slipped and fell overboard when us was off West Africa three years ago ? Come from Croyde 'e did. Poor chap. Screamed fit to wake the dead."

There was no smile on the seaman's face as he drew thus vividly upon his imagination.

William Gammon shook ' his head sadly. " Arh . . . poor chap ! Never seen such a gigan-tical shark in all me born days. So big as a whale 'twas. Eight rows of teeth it 'ad, or was it nine ? Chewed him up bit to a time, it did. Fust an 'and, then a foot. Took nigh 'arf a day afore the shark finished 'im off. Arh . . . terrible 'twas, sure enough. So do 'ee watch y'r step, Joe Dodson, me lad. Maybe, come to think on it, y'd better keep way on a-scrubbin' for the next week. So, scrubbin' it be." William Gammon looked up, caught Dicon's eye and winked.

Dicon closed his left eye and so did Jeremy. The situation was very much to their liking: Justice was being done.

Between William Gammon and Dicon Lovering there was, and always had been, a complete understanding.

William Gammon, ten years older than Dicon, though Bosun of ' The Anne ', was primarily personal servant to Dicon, for where Dicon went,

there went William. It was William who had taught him as a small boy, to snare a rabbit, catch a fish, wrestle—William was a famed Devon wrestler—and to sail a boat. They were inseparable, and their relationship was better described as friends, rather than master and servant. With the advent of Jeremy Wainwright, the son of Dicon's only sister, Sarah, to learn the way of commerce, the seas and ships, William re-lived the years that had gone and Jeremy became his special care.

William Gammon took a look at Joseph Dodson and with a growled warning of what would happen if the scrubbing did not pass muster on his return, set off forrard with the true rolling steps of the seaman at sea.

The onlookers continued to offer advice and details of hangings from yardarms which, apparently, appeared to be the most usual form of punishment for unsatisfactory deck-scrubbing. And Joe Dodson, in his deserved misery, believed them.

Dicon turned to Jeremy. "My dear Jeremy," said he, "you are now fifteen: a great age. I take it that you are looking forward to the day when you will be Master of one of our vessels?"

"You know that, Uncle."

"Most commendable, Jeremy. Then I suggest that, as you have only read the first five pages of the 'Manual of Navigation' during the last three days, the perusal of a few more pages might

be to your advantage by bringing the happy day of your mastership somewhat nearer."

Jeremy looked up. There was a half-smile on Dicon's face. "Uncle Dicon, you are a tyrant. I will get the 'Manual' at once. There are two or three questions that I would ask upon points which are not clear to me."

"One moment, Jeremy my lad," replied his uncle with a grin. "You called me a tyrant. I name you Sir Crafty Artful. Your knowledge of the science of navigation may be less than it should be, but your knowledge of tactics is boundless. You would trade upon my fatigue. Would you pester me with childish questions, which should be apparent to the meanest intellect . . . with but one object—to disturb my well-earned ease. But your cunning avails you in no way, for I now resign my avuncular responsibility to the person of Captain John Coombe."

Thus spoke Dicon, as with a smile of triumph and an airy wave of the hand, he disposed of Jeremy's problems. Captain Coombe chuckled. "'Tis as your uncle has ever been, Jeremy. And who should know better than I who essayed long and earnestly to acquaint him with . . ."

No doubt Captain Coombe would have spoken at length, and with feeling, of his endeavours to teach the young Dicon something of the science of navigation, but whether successfully, or not, will never be known, for from the look-out perched

high on the foremast came an urgent and shattering roar.

To the uninitiated the roar would have sounded like a series of burrs and yells, and quite unintelligible. But to the Devon seamen it was not only intelligible, it was electrifying. One moment they were resting, or carrying out their duties calmly, and the next they were alert, eager and expectant.

"What do you make of it, John," asked Dicon of Captain Coombe.

"Cockle-shell under sail," answered the Ship Master as he handed the glass to Dick.

Dicon, with glass to eye, gazed steadily and then, as he bade Jeremy take a look, agreed with John Coombe. Jeremy, after making his own examination, cried: "Uncle, what think you a boat of that size does so far from land? And I can see no sign of life in her either."

"That, Jeremy, is a matter for speculation," said Dicon. "But we shall know more by bringing her to us."

John Coombe nodded, hailed William Gammon, and gave the necessary orders. William answered: "Aye, aye, sir."

"You may go with William, Jeremy," said Dicon.

Twelve seamen, as agile as monkeys, clambered into a long-boat and Jeremy and William followed. "Lower away!" came the order.

The long-boat touched water gently on level keel with hardly a splash.

William, at the tiller, watched the seamen with a critical eye as oars were unshipped and positioned.

"Wholly and sweetly together," he cautioned. "Give way!" Twelve oars dipped, twelve backs bent and pulled, and twelve oar-blades rose as one.

The long-boat gathered speed and surged forward.

"What do you think, William?" said Jeremy. "Do you think we shall find some shipwrecked mariner in the boat?"

"Can't say, Master Jeremy. Can't see as 'ow any vessel could 'a' got wrecked lately leastaways there ain't been no rough weather. More likely 'tis a boat come adrift from some 'arbour or other . . . and there y' are. Though, that 'ud be a bit queerish seein' as 'ow 'er sail be set . . . an' boats don't nohow lie in harbour with set sail . . . leastways not English boats don't. Foreigners maybe, 'cos foreigners bein' what they be, b'ain't seamen. So likely 'tis a foreign boat." Then to the seamen: "Put y'r backs into it, me lads! Let them aboard 'The Anne' see what y' can do."

The seamen, knowing William, grinned, grunted and quickened the time of stroke and put their backs into it.

"Aye, that's the way of it, me hearties! Now

you be more like Barum men. Don't want to get mistook for Bideford men do 'ee? So pull!"

William knew well how to exploit the rivalry between the men of Barnstaple and those of Bideford. It never failed. "Proper racin' crew," whispered William to Jeremy with a wink.

As the long-boat drew nearer, Jeremy saw the drifting boat was indeed a cockle-shell—a small ship's boat.

William hailed her.

No hail came in reply.

Said William: "Either there ain't nobody in 'er or, if so be there is, then they'm dead."

William rose from his seat in the stern, still keeping his hand on the tiller. He ordered: "That'll do it, me lads. Ship y'r oars."

The oars came in smartly. William put the tiller over hard and the long-boat came easily alongside.

William took one look. "All of you—keep y'r seats! And you, Master Jeremy. I'm a gettin' into 'er—then draw away, until I gives the word. Don't want no plague aboard 'The Anne'!"

William Gammon stepped from the long-boat into the smaller craft, and the long-boat crew pulled away before Jeremy had the time to disobey William and follow him.

"Will 'ee take the tiller, Master Jeremy," asked a seaman, "till Bosun gives us the word? 'E's

as much as we dared force between his lips. And I think his heart beats a little more strongly. If he lives, I wonder what strange tale he will have to tell."

Said John Coombe: "'Twill need to be a good one to compensate us for the calm that has fallen. Let us hope he has not brought us ill-fortune."

CHAPTER II

CHALLONER'S STORY

THE sea was flat : flat and hard and brittle as a mirror. A brazen sun blazed down from a sky as flat as the sea beneath. The calm was absolute and complete, and the air was still ; as if the world had ceased to breathe.

For six days ' The Anne ', her canvas sagging and lifeless, had lain seemingly motionless upon the sun-varnished sea.

If she moved at all it was only by the will of unseen sea currents, and such movements were so slow that they were imperceptible to sight.

Once only had life intruded into the landless waste of sea and sky.

Then came an albatross, a great bird on tireless wings effortlessly skimming the water. So close did it pass ' The Anne ', that its reflection in the sea was clear to the seamen who watched its passing ; so close that they saw the black and gold of its eyes.

And those seamen who did not bow their heads or touch their forelocks, crossed their fingers, for seamen ever hold the albatross in awe. For it has ever been the seaman's belief that this great gull, which traverses hundreds of miles of open sea on unknown errands, brings fortune, good or

ill, and utter disaster is the lot of him who would harm the lord of the ocean skies.

The crew of 'The Anne' daily voiced their bitter complaints against a scurvy fate that put them in the Doldrums and all that it involved. But having got their grumbles off their chests they accepted the inevitable and bore heat, sweat and enforced idleness with admirable equanimity. There was one exception, however, Joseph Dodson, heat or no heat, worked and sweated without respite.

William Gammon saw to that.

"Get on with y'r work, y' lubber. Scrub! And when that be done, I got a bit o' polishin' for 'ee. Now 'ee've got some idea what they poor critters as was a cuttin' sugarcane under the sun felt like. 'Tis all for the good o' y'r soul, leastaways 'twon't be much good for y'r carcass if 'ee don't get a move on. Fair itchin' to tickle 'ee up with the rope's end, that I be."

So Joseph Dodson worked.

Yet, when night brought cool relief and the blistering sun had sunk beyond the line where sea and sky meet, beneath the stars and by the yellow light of lanthorns, the crew made sport.

Then the viol squeaked and the reed warbled the gay airs of heel and toe dances, and the seamen—and who can jig or tread a measure as gaily or as lightly as the seagoer?—threw themselves into the gaiety of it all.

But between decks for six days a man, watched and tended day and night, had fought a battle with death.

It was on the sixth night that Dicon, relieved by Jeremy, said: "I reckon, Jeremy, he will live. He opened his eyes an hour ago and, unlike the previous times, this time there was intelligence in 'em. And I think that his sleep is a healthy sleep at last. The cold broth, laced with eau-de-vie, is over there to your right. No more than a sip when he opens his mouth. And lift his head, don't forget, or maybe he'll choke."

"Aye, aye, Uncle Dicon."

Jeremy sat beside the sick man, watching and waiting for any sign or movement demanding his aid.

The boy looked upon the face of the sleeping patient. He saw the lips were not so swollen as they had been, nor the skin so tightly stretched over the face bones. Jeremy felt that, in some way, death had receded a little from the gaunt and pitiful figure lying so terribly still.

Perhaps an hour, no less, passed before the man stirred and opened his eyes. He looked around him with a vague, puzzled and uncomprehending stare, and his lips parted as he essayed some speech that came out as no more than a bubbling gurgle.

Jeremy slipped an arm around the frail body, smiled reassuringly and said: "'Tis well. You

are with friends, safe and sound, and all you have to do is just get better."

He reached for the broth and poured a little into the open mouth.

It was taken and swallowed.

"A spot more," urged Jeremy, "just a spot. Good! You will soon be on your sea-legs again. Now, lie back and sleep. Plenty of sleep. Nothing to worry about. You are with friends."

Again the man tried speech and again it was too much for him; but his eyes answered that he understood, and he smiled as well as his swollen lips allowed.

"Don't try to talk," said Jeremy. "Get well, that's all. Now, sleep."

Gently Jeremy lowered him to the pillows and watched sleep come.

"He is breathing properly," said Jeremy to himself. "Slowly and regularly. He has won, sure enough."

And Jeremy was right.

The man's recovery was rapid. He let it be known that his name was James Challoner, and his condition, a landowner of Staffordshire: at Blackshaw, near the Derbyshire border. He expressed his gratitude for the kindness afforded him, but when he would have told them of his plight, his distress was so obvious that Dicon bade him say no more.

"He has had a terrible experience, Jeremy,"

said Dicon later, "and one better put out of mind until he is stronger."

Another week passed, and James Challoner took his first faltering walk upon the deck.

No clouds appeared upon the horizon, no winds rose and 'The Anne' remained motionless.

"It cannot last for ever," Captain Coombe consoled himself.

Then came the night, when supper was over and James Challoner had eaten, perforce sparingly, that he said :

"I am, gentlemen, more grateful to you than mere words can tell. Not only for my life, but the very clothes I wear, the food I eat, am I indebted . . ."

Dicon laughed. "We are much of the same build, and my wardrobe is more than adequate for my needs."

James Challoner bowed. "Too, it is seemly that I tell you more of myself and what has befallen me. Doubtless I gabbled a little in my sickness from which you may have gathered some information."

Captain Coombe smiled : "A model patient. You neither gabbled in the delirium which afflicts the near dead, nor did you give trouble of any description."

"I rejoice to hear that," continued James Challoner. "As you now know I am a Staffordshire man, a bachelor, and my age is thirty-four.

I own some property and a fair portion of this world's wealth. Having no one to say me yea or nay, there has been no hindrance to the manner in which I have chosen to occupy my time, and that is, and always has been, a strong desire to see the world at first hand.

"Four months ago I made the necessary arrangements to visit the West Indian Islands, sailing from Bristol in that stout vessel, 'The Bacchante'."

"A well-founded ship indeed, Mister Challoner," observed Captain John Coombe, "I know her well."

"You *knew* her well," said James Challoner. "You will never see her again. She now lies on the bottom with her crew. It was a terrible business."

"The voyage began uneventfully enough—fair weather, in fact a passenger could wish for nothing better, and for a while all went well."

"After we had visited Port of Spain, the Master, Captain Evans—a Welshman from Cardiff, incidentally—showed certain signs of an uneasiness for which I chided him. He had an unaccountable feeling that the voyage would end disastrously; a premonition. He frequently mentioned the ferocity of pirates, which, he averred, swarmed in the Carib seas."

"I told him 'The Bacchante' was well armed, well manned, and should be able to give a good account of herself if attacked, but my words brought no comfort to the good Captain. In fact,

so certain was he of impending disaster that he advised the passengers, four of us including myself, to disembark at San Domingo, our next port of call. Whether he would have persuaded us to do so we shall never know. We never reached San Domingo.

"On a Thursday afternoon it was that we sighted her first ; we only saw her top-sails above the horizon, but within two hours she was recognisable, at least to Captain Evans and his crew. It was obvious to all she was bearing down upon us. Captain Evans put about and we ran before the wind with full sails. We soon knew what vessel pursued us : a lean black vessel she was. Have you, gentlemen, ever heard of a craft named 'The Duchess' ? "

Captain Coombe brought his fist down with a bang on the table.

"'Fore heaven I have, and of her master ! The Duke he's called. The blackest-hearted pirate in the Caribs. Aye, I've heard of him. 'Tis said that he is, or was, a great gentleman who had gone astray. Does his butchery with a bow and a smile . . . but he does it, rot him."

Dicon nodded : "Aye, a gentleman . . . and so for him there is less excuse than for the cut-throat of baser upbringing."

"'Twill be a happy day when he hangs, as hang he will," growled Captain John Coombe.

James Challoner said : "No doubt he will

receive his just deserts. However, gentlemen, I will proceed. For a time the hopes of all aboard 'The Bacchante' were high. The pirate vessel gained but little upon us and night was falling. We felt our chances of escape in the darkness were favourable.

"But two factors had been overlooked: the full moon making the night as bright as day and the winds.

"You, gentlemen, as seamen, will understand when I tell you that the wind dropped, and while it was sufficient for the pirate craft, it was not for our own vessel, being broad of beam and heavily laden with merchandise. Gradually she overhauled us . . . and then the wind rose . . . and we might have drawn away to safety.

"It was a chance shot, a lucky shot, that sealed our fates. That ball, gentlemen, carried away our foremast. . . . I will not linger on . . . the aftermath. I would, if you will excuse me . . . rather leave it to your imaginations." Here Challoner paused for a moment, his lips trembling. Then, pulling himself together, he continued: "As I have said, gentlemen, night had fallen. When it was obvious that further fight would be of no avail, two of the crew and myself, in the pandemonium of the fighting going on aboard 'The Bacchante', managed to cast loose one of her small boats.

"We slipped over the side, climbed in and—

I know not why we were unnoticed—paddled away as silently as might be.

“By good fortune, or Captain Evans's forethought, there was a two-gallon jar of water and a box of biscuits stowed away in the boat. It was good fortune indeed, for in our fear of capture we had overlooked the need of food and water.

“Well, gentlemen, we hoisted the sail and all seemed well, but it was not. The days passed and no sail was sighted. Then our water ran out . . . and . . . one of my companions died. The other lingered on. . . . Then his mind became deranged. He dived into the sea . . . and I was alone. It was not . . . enjoyable, gentlemen. I recall the calm . . . the burning sun. No, it was not enjoyable . . . and . . . as for the rest . . . you know as much as I.”

“Then we may thank God for your deliverance, Mister Challoner. Few have been so close to death, and returned from the shadows,” said Dicon.

James Challoner said slowly: “It was an experience I shall never forget . . . and but for you . . .”

Dicon laughed: “’Twas our good fortune to find you, and now your troubles are over.”

, “Not entirely, though you may aid me if I can further encroach on your generosity. When we reach Boston, by your good offices doubtless arrangements could be made to obtain an advance

of money drawn against my London bankers. I am, I need not remind you, penniless."

"To be sure," said Dicon, "I can personally advance whatever sum you require."

"For which I shall be greatly obliged. You are a Good Samaritan indeed. If you will prepare the necessary document for my signature——"

Dicon cut short James Challoner's words with : "My dear Challoner, I require no signature. Your word is sufficient. It is my experience that a signature is never necessary for the man who would break his given word would as lightly dishonour his signature. I am assured your word is your bond. Let us say no more."

James Challoner thanked Dicon for his generosity and trust, and added : "Let us hope that we shall reach Boston in safety to enable me to take advantage of your kindness. I cannot rid myself of the dread . . . of that ruffian . . . they call The Duke."

Jeremy, who had been sitting silent, laughed gaily. "Sir, let us rather pray that he brings his foul ship and rascally crew within range of 'The Anne's' guns."

James Challoner looked at Jeremy and smiled tolerantly. "Young blood," he said, "recks little of consequence."

"But the lad is right," said Captain Coombe, "there isn't a pirate craft afloat that 'ud give us fight. Sixty-four guns and a Devon crew, trained

and disciplined better than any King's ship crew. Narry a chance would the pirate have, Mister Challoner. There's not a vessel launched that 'The Anne' couldn't outsail or outmanœuvre, so pray hard The Duke brings his 'Duchess' alongside us. We'll hang the one and burn t'other."

"Such confidence is vastly comforting," sighed James Challoner. "'The Duchess' is heavily armed and speedy."

Dicon laughed: "Nevertheless, we should see an end of her."

For a little while the men talked, until James Challoner begged to be excused, saying he was easily fatigued and deemed it time to sleep.

And when he had left them Dicon said: "The last full moon was three weeks back, so the full moon, at the time Challoner escaped from 'The Bacchante', was seven weeks ago. It is fourteen days since we picked him up, which means he was five weeks adrift in that cockle-shell. 'Fore Heaven, his survival amazes me!" Captain Coombe, without a word, took a handful of charts from a drawer, chose one and placed it on the table.

"Take a look at this chart, Dicon, and you, Jeremy. To my way of thinking 'The Bacchante' was taken here." He put a finger on the spot he wished to indicate. He continued: "From stories I have heard of The Duke, he has a hide-away, a deep-water creek, on the north coast of Cuba . . . here!"

Again Captain Coombe jabbed with his finger.

"Taken that the calm is general, 'The Duchess' has been idle as long as 'The Anne'. We can assume therefore, if my opinion of the position of 'The Bacchante' incident is correct and if that of the hide-away is equally correct, 'The Duchess' should be lying somewhere about here."

Captain Coombe's finger pointed to the chart.

"So far so good," said Dicon, as he studied the chart of the Islands, "but what is the object of your sudden interest in the position of 'The Duchess', John?"

"Only, Dicon, that the possibility of meeting 'The Duchess' is infinitely greater than Challoner imagines. When the calm breaks . . . should she sail for Cuba . . . note the course she must steer . . . and our course to Boston is . . ."

Captain John Coombe traced two courses with both forefingers.

Jeremy cried aloud: "We must meet."

"Correct, Jeremy. If my assumptions are not at fault, then, within two, or two and a half days, it is highly probable our courses will cross . . . here!"

"That," said Dicon, "would be entirely to my satisfaction. We should earn the blessings of men at sea today. Yes, a pleasant thought, indeed."

Said Jeremy: "Dodson will find life less arduous when William hears of this. He will forget Dodson . . . in the sharpening of his cutlash!"

CHAPTER III

PERIL ON THE SEA

THE recovery to health made by Mister James Challoner was truly amazing. As Captain Coombe remarked: "That man must possess the stamina of an elephant."

The stamp of his ordeal, of course, had not entirely disappeared, nor was he able, as William put it: "To try the best o' three falls with a Devon wrestler." But he took his airings on deck, ate his victuals, slept like a child, and his conversation was bright, cheerful and carefree.

It was natural that he should be an object of something akin to veneration to the crew of 'The Anne'. They saw a man who had escaped death by a hair-breadth and showed little the worse for it.

Added to that fact was his undeniable charm of manner, unfailing courtesy and an air of elegance and ease that also endeared him to the crew. In short, he was a gentleman in every way and, as such, duly appreciated. And he was not without a sense of humour. He began to cultivate a small black beard, upon the progress of which he joked with those with whom he passed the time of day. "A noble growth, think you? As yet 'tis no more than a suitable sleeping place for the humble cockroach, but given time, no

doubt it will be a boon and a blessing to the lone gull . . . a nesting-place wherein to lay its mottled eggs."

Jeremy, youthfully eager and with no guard upon his tongue, confided in William Gammon the possibility of meeting the pirate vessel, 'The Duchess', quoting Captain Coombe's reasons as his authority.

William spat forcibly over the rail into the dead sea by way of expressing joy. "Ar! so that be the way of it, eh, Master Jeremy? That be proper. Us'll see 'er *Dis-Grace* 'The Duchess' go to the bottom—aye an' 'er crew—leastways them as us doesn't take. Them, Master Jeremy, will do a pretty little dance on nothin', which is only right an' proper seein' as all pirates is pirates and bloodthirsty vermin at that."

William, in common with all seamen of the seventeenth century, regarded pirates as one of the seamen's two mortal enemies, sharks being the other. There was no mercy for the pirate; and rightly so. The law of the sea was rough, it was ready, but it was just and fitting.

Jeremy had predicted when William heard of the likelihood of a sea fight he would tend his cutlash and so give Joseph Dodson a breathing space; and he did. The seamen, seeing William whetting the always razor-edged weapon, put two and two together and questioned their Bosun shrewdly. Naturally such a tit-bit of news could

not be kept secret. It was not to be expected, and William Gammon was but human.

The news was out. Men talked of nothing else . . . except the calm. Water supplies were low ; but the men tried not to think of that. And in some strange way, by some queer illogical process of reasoning, they ascribed their plight to the presence of 'The Duchess' in the same seas. "Such a shameful craft," they said, "manned by such a villainous crew, could do naught else but bring ill-fortune." Naught would go right until 'The Duchess' was at the bottom of the sea and the pirates serving their master, Old Nick, in the bottomless pit.

Seven more days passed, a week in which anxiety put furrows in Captain Coombe's brow and shadows of apprehension in Dicon's eyes. The drinking water situation was fast becoming desperate. "Even at the meagre daily ration, one pannikin per man, we cannot last more than another week," said Captain Coombe.

*

*

*

It was two hours before dawn when Jeremy climbed from his cot, dressed and made his way to the poop deck for his four hours of duty, relieving Dicon.

The helmsman leaned against the poop rail ; there was nothing for him to do. Jeremy chatted to him of nothing in particular when he chanced

to look upwards. "Tom, tell me, do I but imagine it or are the stars less bright than they were when I came on deck?"

"It b'ain't imagination, Master Jeremy. I've a noticed it myself, an' agin . . . the air don't feel the same some'ow."

Jeremy sniffed. "Your right, Tom, there is a difference. Should be dawn before long. . . ."

Dawn came. The first rays rose red above what looked not unlike a range of black mountains beyond the horizon. Tom, the helmsman, needed one look, no more.

"Master Jeremy, do 'ee fetch Cap'an Coombe. Sharp be the word, Master Jeremy. Us ain't got much time. 'Urricane, tornado . . . but whatever y' call it, 'twill be a fair buster I reckons."

Very soon Captain Coombe was on deck, giving his orders, and seamen were racing hither and thither. Meanwhile the black cloud rose and rolled towards 'The Anne', and the sea assumed an oily and—strangely since it was still—a restless look.

Dicon raised his eyebrows as he took his place beside Captain Coombe and watched men in the rigging furling sail at breakneck speed. "We'll be running before the blow with bare poles," said Captain Coombe. "Thank Heaven the storm comes from the sou'-west, so we'll be able to keep to the open sea. I've set the lads to lash down everything movable, guns included, and when

the life-lines are rigged and hatches battened down—save two—we should be all snug and ship-shape. We're in for a snorter, Dicon."

"To be sure, John, and let us give it good welcome."

Before eight of the clock the sky was completely black. Then it came: a blinding flash, splitting the black cloud, and the crash of thunder. As if the splitting of the Heavens had released the imprisoned winds, the first shrieking howl of the tornado came, and with it, blinding, pouring rain.

'The Anne' heeled and came back to an even keel. With legs astride, the helmsman hung on the bucking tiller and looked towards Captain Coombe for orders.

"Keep her so," said the Captain.

Beneath the fury of the wind, the sea rose in its own anger.

Captain Coombe judged the moment.

"Hard over!" he shouted. The helmsman acknowledged the order and obeyed.

Round came 'The Anne', heeling and struggling like some live thing . . . and then she was again on even keel and racing out into the open Main. And the sea rose, great mountainous waves which flung themselves high and crashed down in roaring cascades to surge madly over decks where seamen held grimly to the life-lines stretched from stem to stern.

"We run before the storm, Dicon. 'Tis well

the tornado did not break at night, before we had made ready." Captain Coombe shouted into Dicon's ear to make himself heard above the anger of sea and sky.

And 'The Anne', plunging into an unending succession of great green masses, shivered and struggled, fought and dashed on with screaming winds tearing through the tracery of her rope-work.

Jeremy, holding on with all his might to the life-line across the poop deck, saw the sky rent with flaming strokes while thunder rolled and deafened his ears. As far as he could see there was naught but the raging tumult of the waves ; immense and terrifying.

Into Jeremy's mind came the words of the seamen's prayer. In that vast waste of turbulent water 'The Anne', great ship though she was in man's eye, was in truth no more than an infinitesimal man-made speck. And Jeremy spoke the words in a whisper : "Dear God, be kind to me. Thy seas are so wide and my ship so small."

He looked around him.

Captain John Coombe gazed steadily ahead. His face was set and grim but no sign of alarm showed upon it. With steady hands he held 'The Anne' to her course.

Dicon Lovering essayed a one-sided smile. He shouted : "The weather, Jeremy, is somewhat

inclement. Think of the poor folk ashore ! Chimney-pots falling like rain. Very hazardous being ashore in weather like this."

" I'd risk it, Uncle."

" Come to think of it, lad, so would I."

They both laughed and Jeremy's fears receded— ' The Anne ' would come through her ordeal ; he knew it.

William Gammon, clinging to the taut life-line, came aft. As they watched, he was twice blotted out from sight by thundering cascades of green water sweeping the decks, but there was a grin on his face as he climbed on to the poop, even if the breath had been battered from his body. " Dry as a bone below, Mister Dicon, Sir. Take more'n a bit of a blow like this 'ere to start ' The Anne's ' timbers."

" How fare the lads ? " asked Dicon.

" Proper, Sir. Leastways, there b'ain't no broken bones. Goodish few bruises, which be only natural, seein' as they're all bin pitched about middlin' like. Sam Yeo 'ave lost two front teeth and young Pasmore's a gone and broke his nose but, bless y'r heart, Mister Dicon, I reckon's it'll improve the look of his face seein' as it can't look no worse than it did afore.

" That there Joe Dodson be as sick as a dog an' as scared as rabbit with a stoat after un," William added happily. " Did me a deal a good to look at 'im."

"Thank you, William," said Dicon. "Hold tight! Here it comes."

'The Anne' forced her prow into an oncoming white-capped mountain of water and the next second it crashed down upon them with a roar, sweeping the ship from stem to stern.

William Gammon shook himself. "Water, Master Jeremy," he observed profoundly, "be very wet!"

"And will remain so," said Dicon. "Which reminds me, one must drink and eat. You, Jeremy, had better get below and break your fast. Return within the hour."

"Aye, aye, Uncle Dicon."

"And do you, Jeremy my lad, see how fares our passenger, Mister Challoner. 'Tis in my mind he may be in need of some cheering."

"Aye, aye, Uncle Dicon."

"Then do 'ee go in front of me, Master Jeremy, and don't 'ee let go that line. 'Tain't exactly what 'ee might call a good day for swimmin'."

Jeremy made his way along the deck, lashed by water and wind, holding on grimly. And at his elbow was William with a mighty arm ready, should the raging waves breaking over the decks tear the lad from his hold.

"'Ere 'ee be, Master Jeremy. Down y' goes when I gives the word. Wait!"

A wall of green water, breath-taking, fell upon

them, passed on, then William Gammon forced open the door. "Now!" he cried.

Jeremy heard the door close behind him.

William grinned. "A proper lad," he muttered. "A good plucked 'un. This blow ain't no gentle zephyrro whatever they calls 'em."

Jeremy had not considered in what state he might find Mister Challoner, but he had certainly not expected to find him as he did.

Mister Challoner greeted him with a smile and a wave of the hand. "I rejoice to see no pallor of sickness upon your face, Jeremy," he said. "For the sake of safety I have wedged a bottle of wine and a dish of eatables upon the bunk yonder."

Upon the bunk, wedged by cushions, lay a bottle and dish of pasties.

"A wise precaution, Sir," answered Jeremy, "though I fear you will be sadly disappointed if you had hoped that I should try pouring wine with 'The Anne' pitching and tossing like some wild thing!"

Mister Challoner chuckled, and then laughed aloud as 'The Anne' gave an extra violent lurch and Jeremy slid across the cabin and fell, face foremost, upon the carpeted floor.

Jeremy struggled to his feet and joined in the laugh at his own misfortune.

"I came, Sir, at my uncle's request, to enquire of your welfare and to assure him that you lacked nothing for your comfort."

“ ’Tis kind of your uncle, and you, Jeremy. Now I pray you sit awhile and keep me company,” said Mister Challoner.

All that day ‘ The Anne ’ ran, bare-poled, before the anger of the storm. Neither Captain Coombe, Dicon nor William Gammon left the deck.

It was six of the clock when Captain Coombe muttered, as he pointed to the western sky, “ Thank God.”

“ Amen,” said Dicon. “ The worst is over.”

“ Never, Mister Dicon,” said William Gammon, “ ’ave I seed a bit o’ colour in the sky look prettier than that little bit o’ blue where the clouds be broken. Aye, I reckon us be out o’ trouble, and without sufferin’ bad damage.”

*

*

*

Within twenty-four hours the storm had spent its fury and only rain fell, a kindly rain to fill the depleted water barrels.

An inspection proved ‘ The Anne ’ had suffered little damage from her buffeting and, with a fresh breeze blowing, her sails filled as she steered on a north-westerly course.

The crew were in high spirits, and so was James Challoner, who surprised all by his cheerfulness.

“ I have been upon many voyages,” he said with a laugh, “ and rough weather holds neither terror nor sickness for me, yet I have never before been at sea in such a tempest as we have just

experienced. Your vessel behaved magnificently. You are doubtless, and justly, proud of her."

No words were sweeter in Dicon's ears than those which praised 'The Anne'.

But to Jeremy, when alone, Dicon asked: "And you, Jeremy me boy, did you feel your last moment had come? 'Twas enough to make you."

"I think, Uncle, that God was merciful to us," said Jeremy.

"Aye, lad, and so do I," replied Dicon soberly.

CHAPTER IV

END OF 'THE DUCHESS'

JAMES CHALLONER, amazingly perky, gave it as his opinion that 'The Anne', having been blown so far off her course, would hardly be likely to run across 'The Duchess' after all.

With which opinion Dicon agreed.

Captain John Coombe made no comment, but Jeremy was not slow to notice he studied the charts of the Carib seas, and the adjoining ocean, more frequently and with greater concentration than was his normal custom. Further, he made many and lengthy calculations. Jeremy's curiosity was aroused and he knew only one way of satisfying it. He asked questions.

"Jeremy, a proper study and understanding of the science of navigation enables me to make interesting deductions," Captain Coombe answered, with every indication of high good humour, "for I have been able to calculate exactly how far off our course we have deviated. But not only that, my boy, I have a fairly accurate idea where 'The Duchess' should now be sailing. So you see, given that all my previous assumptions are not at fault, it is mainly a matter of certain adjustments."

"Adjustments, Captain Coombe? I . . . I . . ."

"Providing, Jeremy, 'The Duchess' is bound

for the north coast of Cuba, the adjustments I have in mind do but entail altering our course . . . which . . . according to my calculations . . . would position 'The Anne' 'twixt 'The Duchess' and her hide-away. I should feel somewhat happier if the career of 'The Duchess' came to a right and proper end . . . quickly."

Jeremy, all eagerness, cried, "You think we'll meet and sink her?"

"The odds, Jeremy, are against such pleasure, but there is a decided possibility. I have discussed it with your Uncle. I need not tell you he raises no objection." Captain Coombe grinned with boyish delight.

And Jeremy said one word: "Proper." But he said it as only a Devon man, whose joy is boundless, may do so: with a very ecstasy of rolling r's girdling a long-drawn O.

To the crew it became obvious that, tempest or no tempest, hope of an engagement with the pirate was not dead. They went about their work with infectious enthusiasm. All inflammable materials were stowed away by willing hands. Powder kegs were rolled to their proper positions, shot, ball, chain and bar, placed beside their respective weapons, muskets were unpadlocked from the bulwarks and issued to chosen marksmen, boarding nets and grappling irons were ready at hand away forrard, and detailed boarding parties put razor edges to their steel.

James Challoner remarked lightly : " We have only to discover the Pirate ! Are you so sure of yourself that your preparations for battle are conducted with such inconsequence ? Surely you have overlooked The Duke's reputation ? "

Dicon looked aloft, then up and down ' The Anne's ' decks before answering. He waved his hand to the seamen on deck. " See those lads ? They are no scum from the filth of South American port taverns such as man the privateers. English they are—Devon lads. Their fathers were sailors before them and their grandfathers were Drake's men who wiped the Armada from the seas. Easy-going, kindly men, who would rather laugh than fight . . . yet . . . when fight they must . . . " Dicon shrugged his shoulders and said, as he smiled : " Incidentally they have no love for pirates. However, I do not anticipate any serious engagement should we come upon ' The Duchess '. I envisage nothing more than short, swift and utter destruction."

With every inch of canvas set, ' The Anne ', a towering thing of infinite beauty and grace, cut cleanly through the white-crested waves and held to her course.

Dicon anxiously scanned the horizon, as did all aboard. " We shall know soon, Jeremy, if Captain Coombe's assumptions and calculations merit his industry," said Dicon. Captain Coombe, who gazed fixedly through his glass out upon the

horizon to starboard, ignored Dicon's words, until, taking the glass from his eye and passing it to Jeremy, he said, with the air of a vindicated prophet, "Jeremy, as I remarked the other day . . . the science of navigation . . ."

"Sail ho !"

The look-out's cry ended in a full-throated note of triumph, and it was immediately answered by a rousing cheer from every seaman on deck. Dicon grinned: "John, I bow before superior knowledge . . . at least should the sail prove to be 'The Duchess'. I have been led to believe that not only privateers plough the Main !"

An hour later Dicon bowed ruefully to the Captain. "'Tis 'The Duchess'. James Challoner has recognised her rig."

"Only the blind crow attacks the eagle," said Captain Coombe. "We must provide the blindness for the crow. We turn and run—as if we . . . er . . . anticipated trouble."

So 'The Anne' turned and ran, and thereby set her crew chuckling. With a gay twinkle in his eye, Captain Coombe made full use of his vast experience of sea and ship. By superb seamanship and the dropping of a sheet anchor, he contrived to lose way without recourse to shortening sail or lubberly tacking, and thereby deceived the pursuers into believing 'The Anne' was the slower and less manœuvrable vessel.

'The Duchess' closed in and the Jolly Roger broke and flaunted above her.

James Challoner, hands gripping the poop rail, stared at the oncoming privateer, white-faced and fascinated.

'The Anne's' crew went to their battle posts.

"Jeremy," said Dicon, "now is your opportunity to obtain some knowledge and experience of gunnery. Report to the Master Gunner for instruction."

"Aye, aye, Uncle!" Jeremy dashed below.

Captain Coombe watched calmly; imperturbable. Keenly the helmsman waited for the order.

It came. "Over," cried the Captain.

It was judged and timed magnificently. 'The Duchess' was beginning her starboard tack as 'The Anne' came round, taking the wind clean out of her sails. 'The Anne', sails bellying and with a surging bow wave coursing past her sides, crossed, at a range of fifty yards, 'The Duchess's' bows.

Between decks the guns' crews crouched beside their weapons: the layers squinting along the barrels, the gunners with slow match burning and eyes on the Master Gunner, and the boys squatting on the powder kegs to cover the powder from spark or fire. All was ready . . . waiting.

Jeremy stood beside the Master Gunner. The Master Gunner raised his hand.

The gunners watched tensely. The hand dropped.

Thirty-two slow matches touched thirty-two touch-holes—thirty-two guns spoke and 'The Anne' listed under the shock of detonation. Acrid fumes filled the air.

Captain Coombe smiled grimly. The broadside had torn through 'The Duchess' from stem to stern and, even as he appraised the havoc, 'The Anne' heeled again as she sent a second broadside screaming over the waves.

'The Duchess' staggered and then her main mast toppled and fell slowly . . . a mass of tangled rigging and enveloping canvas.

'The Anne's' swivel guns hurtled their charges of bar and chain into the chaos of destruction.

'The Duchess' was crippled, but her crew were not lacking in courage nor the will to strike back as best they might.

Fiercely they manhandled what guns, between decks, they could bring to bear and, together with the fore and aft swivel guns upon deck, made their reply. But 'The Anne' sailed on imperturbably, turned and came in again on the opposite tack.

Jeremy watched the guns sponged, charged, rammed and run forward, and made ready. 'The Anne' passed astern of the yawning privateer. . . . The men at the guns worked desperately . . . sponge, charge, ram.

The Master Gunner's hand dropped.

Fire to powder.

Again the reverberating roar, and 'The Duchess' lay stricken beyond hope.

She sent a feeble reply, and two pillars of water arose to mark the fall of shot falling short. One alone tore a long sliver of timber from 'The Anne's' bulwarks.

"She's afire," said Dicon, "she's burning!"

A cheer rose from the Devon seamen.

James Challoner neither spoke nor moved. He stared with wide eyes, as one petrified by the intensity of conflicting emotions.

"That is," said Dicon, "you recall, the way I said it would be, Challoner. You have the satisfaction of seeing 'The Bacchante' avenged. 'The Duchess' is doomed. I'll give her no more than an hour."

And there Dicon was wrong by fifty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds.

One moment 'The Duchess' was there and then she was not. One blinding flash, one appalling explosion, and the entire ship had disappeared.

Captain Coombe gasped: "The powder magazine . . . the fire!"

Said Dicon: "'Tis just. But what goes up must come down, and our distance is not great enough for comfort. Precaution is necessary."

Crouched against the bulwarks for greater safety, men waited, and not until the splashings of falling debris had ceased did they again move freely.

Captain Coombe was about to say their work had been done and there would be no need to give attention to surviving pirates, as there could not be any, when a cry and a splash checked him.

The cry came from a seaman pointing to a pirate, who had miraculously escaped death, and was swimming weakly towards 'The Anne'.

The splash came from the body of William Gammon as he dived from 'The Anne's' deck.

There were two rules of the sea. Pirates must be destroyed, but aid must always be given to those in distress. The mighty William, the terrible wielder of the cutlash, obeyed the second.

And Dicon, who saw it all, spoke aptly : "That," he said, "is William all over."

William swam strongly, grabbed the fast-weakening pirate, called him names which cannot be set down, and proceeded to save his life. "Heave me a line, me hearties," he bellowed as he came alongside. "I'll slip a bowline around this 'ere evil-minded rogue what should be with Old Nick, and then you 'auls 'im up."

Men clustered around, among them James Challoner, as the pirate was hauled in-board.

The pirate, exhausted, lay back against the bulwarks, and James Challoner stared. . . .

Suddenly the pirate caught his eye. His mouth opened. . . .

James Challoner's hand went to his belt. I leapt out . . . holding a pistol.

"You dog," he snarled, and fired point-blank.

Then he dropped the pistol and looked at Dicon.

"I should . . . I . . . I had to . . . I recognised him . . . I saw . . . what he did . . . on 'The Bacchante . . . I . . ."

He walked away, and went hurriedly below, his shoulders shaking with emotion.

"Arr," grunted William, wiping water from his face, "now us 'a lost a proper bit of 'anging."

"Have you so, William?" said Dicon. "I take it, it was for that reason you went overboard to save him. You would, no doubt, have placed the noose around his neck?"

"What I means, Master Dicon, is. . . . 'Ere, Master Dicon, you ain't playin' fair . . . least-ways I could 'a taken him under me wing . . . for the good of 'is soul . . . like that there Dodson. Eh, where is 'e? Come to think on it . . . there's a deal of scrubbin' wants doin' bad. I'll get along and sèt 'im to work."

William touched his forelock, and rolled away, thus escaping further embarrassment.

CHAPTER V

ARRIVAL IN BOSTON

THE breeze held fair and 'The Anne' marked the sea miles left astern in the churning foam of her wake. All aboard her were filled with a sense of well-being and a feeling of deep satisfaction. The most evil of the Caribbean privateers had been blasted from the seas.

But one shadow remained and that, strangely enough, was a shadow cast by no substance.

It was right, it was logical, it was natural and understandable that Mister James Challoner should have shot the pirate, but . . .

Mister Challoner had seen what the pirates had done to the crew of the ill-starred 'Bacchante'. He had actually seen the devilries of the particular pirate he had shot. And the law of the sea demanded death for the pirates. Mister Challoner had done no wrong; on the contrary, he had obeyed the law of the sea. And yet from Captain to seaman, all strove to find excuses for an action which, logically, required no excuse.

Dicon put it: "He had every right to shoot the pirate . . . but I wish to Heaven he had not."

No one was more distressed than Mister Challoner himself. He blamed himself repeatedly for lack of self-control, and said that his own sufferings

and those he had seen inflicted on the crew and passengers of 'The Bacchante', were no excuse.

He refused to be reassured or comforted. Said Captain Coombe: "We should have handed the pirate over to the Magistrates at Boston and he would have been hanged. No pirate expects, or gets, any mercy; so why worry about him?"

Mister Challoner continued to worry, though at times he expressed an awed astonishment of 'The Anne's' ability to completely destroy, without serious damage to herself, a vessel of 'The Duchess's' reputation.

Dicon only smiled, but William Gammon laughed his rumbling laugh and cried: "Bless my shirt, Sir, that b'aint naught. Us could sink a fleet o' they varmints afore breakfast an' never know us 'ad done it."

Jeremy, however, found his nose put well and truly to the grindstone. The 'Manual of Navigation', with its fearsome contents, had to be studied. "You must catch up, Jeremy my lad," said Dicon, "after six months idling as a convict slave on a sugar plantation—save when you were not galloping gaily over pleasant country with a beauteous maiden!—'tis time you did some work. And don't try thinking out puzzlers to plague me. Captain Coombe is the acknowledged expert, you said so yourself!"

Then he ruffled Jeremy's hair, pushed his head into the open pages of the 'Manual' and walked

away grinning with Jeremy's wail "Tyrant" ringing in his ears.

'The Anne', with the wind in her favour, made good time, and fourteen days after sinking 'The Duchess' she tied up in Boston Harbour.

Before Mister Robert Hamilton, the Lovering agent in Massachusetts, had time to come aboard, the news that 'The Anne' had not only engaged the notorious 'Duchess', but had completely destroyed her, flashed around the port with almost the speed of the powder magazine explosion that had sent the privateer sky high!

And as the folk of Boston lined the quay to cheer, the seamen, knowing the hospitality of the Bostonians, joyfully anticipated the jollifications and junketings with which they would certainly be regaled.

Mister Robert Hamilton, as agent, came aboard to conduct the matters of business, but forgot his duties on hearing Dicon's and Jeremy's story of the Monmouth Rebellion, its aftermath, and finally, the rescuing of Mister Challoner and end of 'The Duchess'.

"Oh," said Mister Hamilton, "I have letters for you, Dicon, from your father. They were despatched by him in the care of Captain Spry, Master of 'The Lent Lily'. You will accept their delivery at the place of business? 'The Lent Lily' came into port ten days ago and is now again on the high seas bound for the Bahamas."

"Aye, Robert, I'll collect them."

Within the hour Dicon left 'The Anne', in company with Robert Hamilton, and headed for the business premises. The unloading of 'The Anne' began.

Leaning over the poop rail, Jeremy was astounded at the energy and industry of the men toiling with the bales, packages and barrels of the cargo.

"Captain Coombe, the men in our ports at home don't work with such a will," said he.

Captain Coombe laughed. "Of course not, Jeremy. These here are young."

Jeremy blinked. "But they are all grown men."

"So they are, Jeremy, but they are young colonials you know. I mean this is a young country and the colonials are impatient and eager. In two or three hundred years' time they will be much the same as the men in our ports. You see, Jeremy, they are proud of their new land and they have the great ports of England in mind: Bristol, and London. They want to see Boston as large and as thriving and they are impatient to make it so. All the colonial folk are like that, though the folk of Massachusetts are rather more impatient than most. They are ambitious and mighty independent too."

Jeremy understood.

With a grin Captain Coombe added: "Their

anxiety to succeed reminds me of the thirst for knowledge—navigation—which drives the youthful mariner of tomorrow to burn so much midnight oil ! ”

“ Oh, not you as well as Uncle Dicon, sir.”

“ Don’t worry, lad. I do but tease. You do none so badly. Hallo, here comes your uncle Dicon.”

Dicon came aboard. Without preamble, he said : “ Jeremy, I’ve some news for you. Good or bad depends upon your mood. But you can pen a note to Miss Jennifer Rutherford, for you will be giving her neither the benefit of your sea-going knowledge nor go a-riding with her in Devon. I will acquaint her father that he may return to England with Mistress Rutherford and Jennifer aboard ‘ The Anne ’, but we, Jeremy, must remain in New England.”

For a moment Jeremy panicked : “ Uncle Dicon . . . my parents . . . Father and Mother . . . ? ”

“ Nay, lad, they are safe and well in Holland, but, like us, their return to England would seem to be postponed. Let us go down below, my lad, and do you, John, join us. Maybe your advice will well come in handy.”

“ I am with you, Dicon,” said Captain Coombe as he followed them below. “ Is the news you have received indeed ill ? ”

“ You shall judge for yourself,” answered Dicon as he took his seat at the cabin table.

He placed the letter on the table. Jeremy sat still and said nothing.

“ This letter,” began Dicon, “ comes from my father. To you, John, he sends his felicitations and assurances of his highest regard. To you, Jeremy, his grandfatherly affections, as well as an enquiry as to the progress you make with your studies : navigation and seamanship. You may read for yourself, but first it is well that I recount the gist of it, and mighty disturbing you will find it, too.

“ As a beginning, the possibility of obtaining a pardon for a crime of treason, of which though guiltless, we were sentenced by my Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys, can be forgotten. Your parents, Jeremy, are in the same boat. At least for the time being, if we put foot in England most unpleasant things will happen to us. The situation is this : there is trouble in England, bad trouble. .

“ You will recall, King James has ever been a Roman Catholic, but prior to the Monmouth Rebellion he did not interfere with our form of worship. He was tolerant. He had a right to worship as he wished, and he respected our right to worship as we wished. To my mind the Rebellion is to blame, for now, doubtless, King James sees further rebellions and plots against his person in every Protestant word, and he has acted accordingly. He has given army com-

missions to Roman Catholics and has raised an army, commanded by Roman Catholics, which is now encamped on Hounslow Heath.

“Parliament protested. The King thereupon disbanded Parliament. But that is not all. His advisers are now also Roman Catholics and, Jeremy, our dear friend Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys has been appointed Lord Chancellor and presides over a Court of Ecclesiastical Commission. In short, King James seeks to overthrow the Protestant religion of England.”

“Heavens!” gasped Captain Coombe, “that will mean Civil War again. Hasn’t old England seen enough of that? Has the King’s mind betrayed him?”

“I know not, John, but more like ’tis his advisers, self-seeking curs using religion to cloak their base ambitions, who have betrayed him. But civil war or no civil war, while the present situation remains in being, England would be most unhealthy for Jeremy and myself. While we are guiltless of treason, we are guilty of escaping from the slavery to which we were sentenced—and there can be no doubt that this fact is known and our return home is awaited.”

“So be it,” said Captain Coombe. “You must remain here in New England. You have no alternative. But, I venture to prophesy, all will be well in less time than you think. Neither King nor Parliament dare gainsay the will of England.

Either King James will bend before the storm he will raise or he will be broken."

"Aye, that's true, John, and there's the pity of it, for the King had much to commend him. He was no tyrant, he was a kindly man with the well-being of his people near to his heart. And should he go, who will follow? Mary, his daughter, married to William of Orange? And what do we know of Dutch Willie, a foreigner?"

"Come, Dicon, you look upon the dark side," chided Captain Coombe, "'tis not like you. Parliament, King James, Dutch Willie . . . what of them? Rulers come, rulers go, and the oak trees will still flourish in old England; the wind will still blow and ships will sail the seas, and England will be England just the same, when you go home again."

"Aye, John, that's the way of it."

And then the cabin door opened, and Dicon, Captain Coombe and Jeremy stared . . . and stared.

Framed in the doorway stood a gallant tricked out in such finery that the beaux of St. James would have paled beside his colourful magnificence. With a full-bottomed periwig hanging to his shoulders, fine lace at throat and wrists, a coat of plum brocade, blue satin breeches, a scarlet embroidered baldrick supporting a silver-hilted rapier in a black velvet-covered scabbard, silk hose and high-heeled silver buckled shoes, he made a brave showing.

He swept his plumed hat from his head with a flourish and bowed with the elegance of a Court dandy.

“Gentlemen, I have taken the opportunity to make a few purchases. I am, gentlemen, your humble and devoted servant.”

Mister James Challoner smiled gaily, twirled his moustache, stroked his neatly pointed beard and observed : “Fine feathers make fine birds !”

And Dicon ran his hand through his close-cut hair, smacked his thigh and then, throwing up both hands in a gesture of surrender to such grandeur, said : “Solomon in all his Glory . . . !”

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERY OF THE RED-HAIRED LADY

DICON and Jeremy pondered deeply on the matter of their future, and it was Captain Coombe who provided at least a part solution. "You can," said he, "profitably spend your time in exploring the hinterland of New England, particularly Massachusetts, with a view to expanding trade. I am convinced there are sources of commerce in plenty so far undiscovered which, if developed, would be to the advantage of both Colonials and the Loverings."

The idea appealed to Dicon, and Jeremy took to it enthusiastically.

"But if you think it is just going to be a bear-hunting expedition, me lad," said Dicon to Jeremy, "you are going to be disillusioned. We shall give our undivided attention to the furtherance of commerce and, to provide amusement for your spare time, you will take your 'Manual of Navigation'."

The full effect of Dicon's avuncular regard for his nephew's future was, however, ruined. His sly wink to Captain Coombe did not pass undetected, which, no doubt, accounted for the cheerfulness of Jeremy's "Yes, Uncle Dicon."

While he agreed with Captain Coombe upon the desirability of expanding trade, the manner

The Mystery of the Red-haired Lady 63

of its accomplishment demanded consideration. Dicon put it to Jeremy : " Since we have no other choice, Jeremy, let us perform the duties thrust upon us in a way that will also provide some entertainment."

William Gammon demanded that where Dicon and Jeremy went there should he go. " Last time 'ee went off on y'r own, Mister Dicon, look what 'appened to 'ee. Gets y'rself, an' Master Jeremy, mixed up in rebellions and ends up as convict slaves. Y' aint safe to be left alone, and so I be goin' with 'ee."

Dicon made a mock show of denying William's request and, by way of thwarting him, asked amicably : " But what of Joseph Dodson ? His fate and his future are in your hands."

" 'Im ! " grunted William. " 'E'll never be a seaman ! But don't 'ee worry about Joe, Mister Dicon. I've gotten 'im work . . . on the water-front. A loadin' an' a unloadin'. Seein' as 'e's a workin' for Mister 'Amilton I reckons as 'e'll work."

The matter was soon settled. William was to accompany Dicon and Jeremy, as he knew he would ; and as Dicon and Jeremy had known he would.

The manner, the method of his projected exploration, Dicon discussed with Robert Hamilton, and even sought advice of certain Bostonians with whom he was acquainted. But at the first

mention of trade, the Bostonians, with true colonial civic pride, promptly turned the conversation to the growing size and prosperity of their town, not omitting their plans for the future ; particularly their appreciation of learning. Had they not the most up-to-date Academy in New England : Harvard College ?

Dicon congratulated them upon their achievement. That one day, as the Bostonians confidently proclaimed, Harvard would be a second Oxford University, Dicon had no opinion, though he believed if only energy and a will to create were needed, then Harvard College would surely rival ancient Oxford. It would be a miraculous achievement. As Dicon saw Harvard, it was a small edifice but fifty years' old and erected for the small sum of seven hundred and fifty pounds left for that purpose under the will of a parson, the Reverend John Harvard.

Whatever the outcome of the Bostonians' urge to expand and thrive, the Bostonians were too full of their own plans to offer Dicon help with his problem.

But it was Robert Hamilton who set Dicon's feet upon the track of fresh commercial enterprise.

One evening Dicon, Jeremy, Captain Coombe and James Challoner were supping at the house of Robert Hamilton. After they had eaten, Robert Hamilton took from his vest pocket a red stone, radiating fire in the candlelight.

The Mystery of the Red-haired Lady 65

Dropping it casually upon the table, he asked :
“ Dicon, what think you of that gee-gaw ? ”

Dicon examined the stone. “ A ruby,” he said,
“ and a lovely thing.”

He passed it around.

James Challoner held and examined it longer than the others. “ I have some knowledge of precious stones. This is undoubtedly from the Far East—Burma, and is a splendid specimen. Am I far out in estimating its value to be in the region of two hundred sovereigns ? ”

“ It is worth three hundred, so I am informed by an expert. I paid one hundred for it,” said Robert Hamilton. James Challoner smiled, congratulated Robert Hamilton upon his bargain, and expressed a wish that he too could make such advantageous dealings.

Robert Hamilton returned the ruby to his pocket and, apparently dismissing it from mind, said : “ Dicon, I have been thinking that you might find it both interesting and good business if, in your coming travels, you made a point of giving your attention to a small settlement rejoicing in the somewhat original name of Perfect Peace. Incidentally, Jeremy, I understand bears and other wild creatures abound in the vicinity.

“ Besides which, I will confess that I should greatly like to have my own curiosity satisfied ! ”

Dicon chuckled : “ So we discover your motive,

Robert. Tell us what about Perfect Peace has aroused your curiosity ? ”

“ Bear with me, gentlemen, and I will endeavour to first satisfy the curiosity „I have aroused in you, and at the same time, arouse a greater to spur you on.

“ Perfect Peace is some seventy miles inland ; almost due west of Boston. The settlement now comprises, to the best of my belief, about forty men and one hundred and thirty women and children. It came into being some ten years ago. The settlers disembarked here and proceeded inland, fifty of them, including women and children.

“ They travelled on until they found the place where they would build. That was in summer time. They set about their task, toiling desperately to raise habitations before the winter came. That year winter came far earlier than usual, and it was the hardest winter, so the older folk hereabouts tell me, that they had ever known ; and the longest. The settlers had succeeded only in erecting one complete building—a chapel—when the snow came.

“ When winter struck, the chapel gave them shelter. But they were inexperienced, new to the rigours of a New England winter, and did not know how to protect themselves.

“ It was inevitable they should be struck down with lung sickness. So they died . . . one after the other. The ground was too hard to dig, and

The Mystery of the Red-haired Lady 67

they could not bury their dead. All through the winter the poor bodies lay on frozen ground. And when the spring came there were but twelve left to bury those who had died.

"But those twelve were proud and great. They refused help, saying they could not re-pay and it was their duty to fight on alone.

"They did. They had no horses, so they harnessed themselves to draw the ploughs and till the land. They were their own beasts of burden. They toiled and somehow they survived.

"From that day they have flourished. New folk have joined them, but we know little of them. Occasionally an elderly man comes to Boston to purchase tools and the necessities of life, but he is strangely reticent and will not willingly enter into any conversation. Apart from his name, Joslin, and that he speaks with what I believe to be a West Country accent, neither I, nor anyone else, know anything of him.

"It is known that the folk of Perfect Peace live in amity with the Indians, with whom they trade, though the Indians say they drive a mighty hard bargain."

"'Um," said Dicon. "Joslin say you? 'Tis a good West Country name, especially in Devon. But say on, Robert, for, as I know you, it would take more than you have told to arouse your curiosity."

"You speak the truth, Dicon. About eighteen

months ago there came into Boston a vessel out of Bristol, 'The Kittiwake'. From that vessel two women were disembarked, one about forty or fifty and obviously a servant of the other, who was a lady . . . a great lady. One glance was enough to confirm it. Her age was about twenty, I would say. Aye, and no more beautiful a young lady have I ever seen. Naturally enough, everybody in Boston was talking about her—but who she was, or is, not a soul has ever discovered. The two were met by our friend Joslin of Perfect Peace. They hurried away and from that day to this not a word of them has been heard."

"It's a strange story, Robert," said Dicon slowly, "and now tell us . . . what connexion is there between your mysterious lady and that ruby? You haven't told us this story, or shown us that ruby without reason, so come on, Robert, we would hear more."

"I wondered when you would ask me about the ruby. Very well. The lady arrived here eighteen months ago. This is the third precious stone that has come into my hands; one every six months. They have been brought here by the elderly man, Joslin, from Perfect Peace. On each occasion he had asked the sum of one hundred pounds, neither more nor less. With the money received he has purchased the tools of agriculture . . . and . . ."

"And what, Mister Hamilton?" asked Jeremy.

The Mystery of the Red-haired Lady 69

“ Weapons, Jeremy. Muskets and two pieces of artillery.”

James Challoner asked jokingly : “ Do you anticipate an attack upon Boston, Mister Hamilton ? ”

Robert Hamilton laughed : “ It may be that they are expecting trouble from the Indians, though that is unlikely. We should hear if there were any rumours of unrest among the Indians. No, I think we can rule that out—at least for the time being.

“ The point is—where are the jewels coming from ? The proceeds of robbery or piracy ? No, I think not. ’Tis my opinion the unknown lady brought them with her. But is she giving them freely—for some altruistic motive ? Or . . . under duress ? Or does she even live ? We have no word of her, and she has not been seen since she disembarked at this port a little more than eighteen months ago.”

“ You have certainly succeeded in rousing my curiosity, Robert,” said Dicon. “ I admit to being vastly intrigued. Yes, I think we might visit Perfect Peace.”

“ Yes, that will be splendid, Uncle,” said Jeremy ; “ when can we start ? ”

Captain Coombe raised his hand : “ Easy it goes, gentlemen. Not so fast ! I’ll grant you your story holds interest, Robert, yet we must not let fancy override fact. You know nothing

of what goes on in Perfect Peace. Our duty lies in promoting commerce. What are our chances, think you, of expanding trade if Dicon does take himself off on this expedition ? ”

“ Excellent, Captain Coombe. The folk of Perfect Peace flourish, but we do not trade with them. We could, with profit, do so. It is my hope, apart from discovering the situation of the lady, that Dicon will persuade the settlers to do business with us.”

“ Ah well,” said Captain Coombe, “ then we must give the matter full consideration.” But Captain Coombe knew well enough Dicon’s decision had already been taken.

James Challoner looked up and said quietly : “ Lovering, may I join you in this venture ? As you are aware, it is my desire to study the world and its people at first hand. Here is rare opportunity that I should not miss. I can make myself useful, I assure you.”

Dicon looked and laughed : “ Why not ? ” said he. “ In your finery it could well be, should the mysterious and lovely lady be no myth, you would charm her so that the trade of Perfect Peace falls into our hands like a ripe plum.”

“ I rejoice,” cried James Challoner, “ and I thank you. Yet despite the value of fine attire you so flatteringly indicate, I shall discard my fripperies for more practical wear.”

Dicon, catching Captain Coombe’s reproachful

The Mystery of the Red-haired Lady 71

eye, said hurriedly : “ That is, of course, should we decide to undertake the project.”

And Jeremy, who had also caught his uncle’s eye, said most righteously : “ Of course, Captain Coombe.”

CHAPTER VII

DEPARTURE FROM BOSTON

ROBERT HAMILTON had acquired from the Bostonians something of their sense of urgency and an unshakable belief that "Procrastination is indeed the thief of time". His guiding axiom had become "Do it now!" so that whatever planned was done at once.

No sooner had Dicon committed himself to the undertaking of the trade expansion project, especially with the settlers of Perfect Peace, than Robert Hamilton threw all his energies into the preparations. As a result Dicon found all gear for the journey thrust upon him before he had completed his personal arrangements, including the acquisition of those maps necessary for journeying in wild country.

If Robert Hamilton had been hasty in his endeavours he had certainly overlooked nothing. Riding horses, pack horses, tents, bedding, stores, muskets, pistols (with powder and ball in ample quantity), medicaments, lanthorns and a guide were all presented for Dicon inspection and approval.

The guide, one Tallwahma, a tall lean Indian of few words, answered, so Robert Hamilton informed Dicon, to Barebones, which was less of a tongue-twister than his native name.

"You will find him invaluable," said Robert Hamilton, "and absolutely trustworthy. I have no great faith in the accuracy of the available maps, whereas Barebones knows the country like the back of his own hand."

"I'll grant you, Robert," answered Dicon, "you are mighty thorough."

Jeremy, however, shook his head. "I fear, Uncle, our expedition is doomed. We lack the one absolute essential for success. It is hard to understand how Mister Hamilton came to overlook them; they are big enough in all sense."

"Hey? What d'ye say, Jeremy? Forgotten? I? What?" demanded the outraged Robert Hamilton.

"Elephants!" said Jeremy as he dodged away smartly.

Dicon laughed. "Who knows? An elephant might come in handy. However, Robert, I'll start in two days' time."

"Jeremy," said Dicon, when Robert Hamilton had left them, "you are rising sixteen and well grown for your age. You know how to handle a rapier as well as most men, probably better. I have spent many an hour teaching you as best I know how, and you do not disgrace me, lad. Also you have been taught by William the proper uses of firearms, so come you into my cabin."

In the cabin Dicon took from an oak chest a rapier, baldrick and two pistols.

Without a word he slipped the baldrick over Jeremy's shoulder and placed the rapier in its housing.

"Put the pistols in your belt, Jeremy lad."

"Aye, aye, Uncle."

Jeremy took one pistol, cocked it, ascertained it was unloaded, placed it in his belt and repeated the process with the other.

Dicon smiled approval. "Your teaching has not been forgotten, Jeremy. 'Tis well. Pistols are chancy things. Many a fool has spent a life of regret as the price of a moment's thoughtlessness. It is no comfort to say you didn't know it was loaded: that doesn't bring back the life of a loved one, Jeremy."

"Aye, aye, Uncle."

"Now, lad, out with your blade; try it for balance."

The steel flickered out of the scabbard.

Poised, Jeremy lunged, recovered, lunged again.

"Sweet and proper, Uncle."

Dicon nodded: "I bought it for you, lad, against the day when I should judge you mature enough to carry one. The blade is of Toledo steel. I beg you examine it."

Near the hilt Jeremy read his name etched in the blade—"Jeremy Wainwright".

"Thank you, Uncle," he said soberly.

"Your name is on your weapon, lad, keep 'em both bright and shining. You know, Jeremy,

the carrying of a sword brings a secondary burden ; the power to keep it sheathed when, in anger, you would draw it.

“ Swords, Jeremy, exert an evil influence upon certain folk. They create a desire to kill, and that is evil. Your true swordmaster is not mastered by such influences ; nor will you be, lad.

“ When you draw your steel, let it be for protection only ; first for the protection of those who need aid and, if all other methods are unavailing, for your own. And above all else, beware of the duello, Jeremy. An angry word . . . the steel is out . . . and someone is maimed or dead. All done in anger. Keep clear of those stupidities unless you are so confident of your ability that you can fight and disarm your opponent before blood flows.”

Jeremy understood. His uncle Dicon was, at that time, reputed to be the finest swordsman in all England. In his adventurous career Dicon Lovering had been called out many times and had no more than disarmed his man, and to the satisfaction of honour, without bloodshed.

“ Yes, Uncle,” said Jeremy, “ it is understood. I . . . I will do my utmost to keep the blade bright. And I shall try to use it as you do : as nearly as I may, for I know I shall never equal your skill.”

“ Jeremy, lad, modesty befits you. Yet I am assured you will acquire greater skill than I, as

the years go by, though to be sure you have been given greater advantages than I ever had."

"Advantages greater than you were afforded, Uncle?"

"Certainly," laughed Dicon. "Have you not had me to teach you the art?"

"I must have erred!" said Jeremy. "My ears have deceived me, Uncle, for I would have sworn that but a moment ago, I heard you mention the word 'modesty'."

"Back to the study of navigation, ungrateful youth! I have done with you!"

"I have an urgent appointment, Uncle. I must show William my rapier," replied Jeremy.

"Have you, Jeremy? Well, William will tell you 'tis a pretty enough toy, but when it comes to fighting then there's only one weapon, the cutlash!"

Jeremy was as well aware that William would say exactly what Dicon had prophesied, but he went . . . and proved it!

*

*

*

At nine in the morning the little cavalcade set off from Boston.

Robert Hamilton, as he waved farewell, shouted: "Do not forget, Dicon, my curiosity is boundless!"

William Gammon forgot that it was his insistence that he should accompany Dicon and Jeremy

wherever they might go, that accounted for his presence with them, for William had no love of horses.

He complained bitterly that their value was vastly over-rated as a means of transport, and he compared them unfavourably with ships. Ships did not roll in a calm sea. Horses did on a flat road—and he did not care to be bumped up and down in a hard saddle. That made him stiff and sore. Further, the steering of horses was a complicated business after the simplicity of a ship's rudder. William vowed he had grave doubts of his ability to survive days of riding, and considered the likelihood of ever seeing Devon again—never mind enjoying a leekie pie or a dish of cream and raspberries—as distinctly remote.

James Challoner, who had discarded his recently acquired finery for more suitable attire, expressed his sympathy for William and thereby provoked roars of laughter from Dicon and Jeremy.

"Take no account, Challoner," said Dicon, "William has ever grumbled about horses. He would be unhappy otherwise."

"'Eart o' stone, that's what y've got, Mister Dicon. No proper consideration. An' me what's looked arter y' like a mother. Proper ungrateful, that y' be."

"Then return to Boston, William. It makes my heart bleed to see you suffer so. Jeremy and

I are not worthy of such devotion," said Dicon sorrowfully.

"Ar, there you goes! Lot o' old rummage! Wants to get rid o' me. But y' b'ain't a-goin' to. Shame on 'ee, Mister Dicon. As sharp as a serpent's tooth. Cuts me to the quick it do arter all these years."

"My uncle is a tyrant, William," said Jeremy; "I've told him so. You return to Boston, William, never mind him."

"Ar, so y' wants to be rid o' me too! Like uncle, like nephew. Cruel an' ungrateful! But I b'ain't leavin' y' . . . leastways whilst I live, though I reckons that'll not be for long. Suffering I be, but loyal: not like some as I could mention."

William continued to bewail his fate to the bewilderment of James Challoner and the delight of Dicon and Jeremy who, whenever William chanced to forget his woes, made remarks which were as fuel to a smouldering fire to set William moaning all over again.

They journeyed leisurely. James Challoner lived up to his self-confessed interest in the world. He duly noted and commented upon all he saw. "A vast country!" he said. "Think you that there may be coal or ore beneath the land we tread, Lovering? There is a fortune to be made from timber. The forest land is magnificent. And the pasture is rich. A country of opportunity I doubt not."

He admitted a curiosity as great, or greater than, Robert Hamilton's, concerning Perfect Peace, but it was Robert's story of the three precious stones that was obviously ever in his mind. "Lovering, those jewels of which Hamilton told us excite me strangely. Perhaps they are from some robber's hoard. Perhaps a member of the Perfect Peace community, at one time or the other, hit upon some long dead pirate's treasure. There is romance in the thought of it! A pirate's hidden treasure, Lovering, think of it!"

"A pretty story, but unlikely, Challoner. Any seaman in any port would tell you a more likely in return for a jack of ale!" replied Dicon with a grin.

Jeremy had no interest in either robbers' hoards or pirates' treasure. True, he saw deer, and once buffalo, but it was a bear, the bigger and more savage the better, he wished to see and hunt. And when he did not, thereupon he felt he had been deprived of something which was his right, and well-nigh joined William in complaint against awkward fate.

The grave and taciturn Barebones, to whom Jeremy turned for help to find a bear, shook his head, pointed to the sky and said: "Too much sun," from which Jeremy was meant to understand it was the wrong time of the year to hunt bears. However, Jeremy's persistence achieved one thing, upon which Dicon complimented him. He actually brought a smile to Barebones's straight face.

On the afternoon of the fourth day of their travels Barebones gave the signal to halt, and taking Dicon to the top of a near-by hill, he pointed and said two words: "Perfect Peace."

In the distance Dicon saw a small settlement surrounded by what appeared to be a wooden stockade, the land around which was either under cultivation, or pasture where cattle grazed.

Dicon would have ordered the march to continue then and there, but Barebones made signs indicating people asleep, and shook his head.

"No good. Tomorrow good. Night sleep. Stockade shut close. No go."

Dicon was first puzzled, but comprehension came. Barebones meant the people of Perfect Peace closed the stockade by night and no one was allowed to enter the settlement. He nodded, said he understood, and Barebones was satisfied.

"Mighty suspicious set of folk," said Dicon to himself, "or mighty careful. Ah well, the place is theirs and tomorrow will come."

He returned to the others and tents were set up and the evening meal prepared. With the dawn they struck camp, loaded the pack-horses and set off towards Perfect Peace. As they entered the area of cultivation around the settlement, men were already at work with hoe and mattock. They stared at the travellers but gave them no greeting.

"We would not appear to be particularly wel-

come, Lovering," observed James Challoner. "One would have believed that strangers bringing news of the outside world would be naught else but gladly received. I find their attitude, such as we have observed, remarkably odd."

Dicon shrugged his shoulders. "No doubt they have a reason."

William growled: "I care not for reasons. All I asks is to get out o' this 'ere saddle. I be that stiff an' sore I doubt I'll ever sit in comfort again."

They approached the stockade gate and were at once confronted by a lad of not more than thirteen, carrying a musket taller than himself.

"Stand!" he cried in a thin, quavering boyish treble. "Stand, or I fire!"

"Give you greeting, lad," said Dicon. And having noted the lad's grip upon the musket and his patent unfamiliarity in the use of it, he asked mildly: "My lad, is that . . . er . . . thing charged?"

"Aye, that it is, and so do you stand where you are!"

"That we will do, but I beg of you to take care lest you accidentally discharge your piece when the recoil would lay you flat upon your back."

The lad, ignoring Dicon, called loudly: "Grandad, Grandad, there are enemies at the gate!"

An ancient man came out at a shambling run with long-barrelled pistols in either hand.

Levelling the pistols at Dicon he puffed and blew out the question : " Who are you and what d'ye want here, eh ? "

" We are," said Dicon, " travellers from Boston. We have come here to explore the possibilities of trade with the folk of Perfect Peace. What we want are lodgings."

" Ha, so you say, but y' can't gammon an old 'un like me with any tale of cock and bull. Arty, me fine lad, run an' tell the Governor. He'll say what's to be done."

" Aye, that I will, Grandad."

The lad laid his musket on the ground, as if he were glad to get rid of the thing, and scurried away as fast as his legs would carry him.

" Maybe you're all y' say . . . and then again, maybe y' aren't, so stand still or these here barkers 'll bark," the old man admonished them in war-like tones.

" Don't y' fret now, Granfer," said William, " or they barkers o' yourn 'll likely turn round and bite 'ee. Leastways they would if they was loaded, which they noways ain't."

" You're a liar," shouted the old man, " they're loaded. I loaded 'em myself."

" Prove it," said William. " I wager y' a shilling they b'ain't."

" Look for yourself then. There y' are, look ! Now give us your shilling."

"Aye, you be right," said William, "they be loaded now . . . but they ain't any more." Whereupon William pointed the weapons skyward and pressed the triggers.

The crash of the double discharge brought a shriek of anger from the old man and a hurried exodus of more old men, women and children from houses within the stockade. The old men and children rushed to the gate, but the women huddled together and advanced no nearer than within twenty yards.

Then the boy Arty returned, running along beside a tall, middle-aged man who came with long strides. Way was made for him.

"What is this shameful disturbance?" he demanded.

Everyone began to speak at once. He raised his hand for silence and it was given.

Dicon, with a half-smile on his lips, explained the circumstances and his reasons for coming to Perfect Peace. He followed his explanation by naming his companions and adding: "And you, Sir, I take it, are Mister Joslin. Our agent, Mister Hamilton of Boston, made some mention of your name."

"My name is Joslin, Hebor Joslin, elected Governor of Perfect Peace, Mister Lovering. You are, I assume, one of the Lovering family, Merchant Venturers and Bankers of Barnstaple and Langley Barton. Your family name and

reputation is, of course, well known to me. I am a Devon man myself."

"I reckons you be a Bideford man, then," said William gruffly.

"Bideford? No, I am a native of Hartland. Why should you assume I am a Bideford man, though Hartland is no far cry from Bideford?"

"By the welcome us got," said William. "Sort of welcome a Barnstaple man 'ud get from a Bideford man."

Hebor Joslin permitted himself to smile. He was well aware of the rivalry 'twixt Barnstaple and Bideford.

He said: "I must apologise for the show of . . . er . . . arms. Truth to tell, since there is little danger by day, we allow the young to practise with arms so that when they are men they will be proficient. The old . . . they are of no account. Their time of usefulness is past. By night the stockade is manned by men of experience who are now at their daily toil."

"You expect trouble, Sir?" asked Dicon. "I understood from Robert Hamilton you lived on good terms with the Indians."

"Indians are not the only potential enemies with which we may have to contend, Mister Lovering. We believe in being prepared. We have our destiny to fulfil. But if you will follow me I will conduct you to our guest house. When you are refreshed we can discuss whatever projects

you have in mind. I am inclined to see the hand of Providence in your advent. Yes, the wealth and influence of the Loverings would be . . .”

Here Hebor Joslin broke off as if he said too much.

Dicon said nothing. There would be another time.

CHAPTER VIII

PERFECT PEACE

THE guest house proved to be a single-storied building comprising a large common room and eight small bedrooms. Adjoining the guest house stood the small house of Mistress Morrish who, Hebor Joslin informed his guests, tended the wants of visitors to Perfect Peace. He hinted that visitors to Perfect Peace were few and not particularly welcome.

He also said that Mistress Morrish was a widow, her husband having died of lung sickness in the early days of the original settlers' endeavours to erect the township and wrest a living from the land. He made it quite clear that the more visitors paid for their lodgings and victuals, the more Mistress Morrish would be pleased. Having no husband she had little money.

Dicon assured the Governor that Mistress Morrish would have no reason to complain on their account.

Mistress Morrish, middle aged, dressed wholly in black, enquired of her guests their likes and dislikes in the matter of food in a flat, emotionless voice. When Dicon asked her how the settlement came to be called Perfect Peace, her answer came in a voice startlingly different: as if she were exalted. "From this town shall Perfect Peace

grow and enfold the whole world. Here we have naught but Peace."

"A splendid sentiment, Mistress, and one which I pray we may all live to see made manifest. Yet, surely, even in your pleasant settlement, there are, occasionally, petty quarrels?"

"We have no quarrels here, Sir. We have laws which none dare disobey. By self-denial and rigid discipline only can Perfect Peace be maintained."

"I am greatly in favour of discipline, Mistress, but I beg of you . . ."

But Mistress Morrish excused herself from further conversation, saying she must tend the oven or supper would be spoiled.

"This place gathers interest, Lovering," said James Challoner. "Peace through discipline! Laws which no one dare disobey! Guards by day on the stockade!"

"I think," said Dicon, "our policy is to say as little as possible and keep our ears wide open. Above all, make no mention of Hamilton's mysterious lady or the jewels."

James Challoner agreed.

After supper, a meal during which Barebones was at no pains to disguise that he felt out of place and uncomfortable, Dicon suggested that they should walk around the settlement. William had only one desire, to rest, so with Jeremy and James Challoner, Dicon strolled out of doors.

"I only wish to see what happens if we should express a desire to take a country walk."

The sentry on the stockade gate was no inexperienced youth. He halted the party sharply, and the way he handled his musket showed it was not the first time a weapon had been in his hands. He was polite but firm. "Once the stockade gate is closed at sunset, Sir, no one enters or leaves Perfect Peace. That is a law."

"I understand," said Dicon. "Law is law, and we, your guests, naturally abide by it. We did but want to view the countryside by moonlight."

"There is no law against that, Sir. If you cross the town to the North Gate, there is a watchtower and the guard there would have no objection to your viewing the countryside from it. Very fine view it is too, Sir." Then he added with pride, "Two new pieces of artillery we have there, Sir. The North Gate faces the Forest, whence trouble could be expected if it should come."

Dicon thanked the man, wished him good-night, and the three made their way back to the guest house.

"Uncle Dicon," said Jeremy, "these folk here dress like the Puritan folk in England . . . only rather more so. I mean like the pictures I've seen of the Roundheads who followed Oliver Cromwell. They are all in black, and even that sentry, guard, or whatever he is, wore a sugar-

loaf hat like the Governor. And Mistress Morrish said something about discipline and self-denial maintaining peace. Did not the Puritans of Oliver Cromwell hold that belief ? ”

“ The Puritans were great believers in self-denial and greater believers in denying things to others, Jeremy, but I doubt they set so much stock on it as Mistress Morrish appears to do.”

James Challoner laughed. “ It would take more than rigid discipline to keep me from sleep this night and I’m not denying it ! I’m for my bed.”

And so they went to their beds where William Gammon had preceded them. He was snoring lustily.

*

*

*

When morning came, Hebor Joslin came to the guest house. He asked of the visitors’ comfort and, having ascertained Mistress Morrish had given every satisfaction, suggested he should conduct Dicon, James Challoner and, after a second’s hesitation, included Jeremy, in his invitation.

William Gammon and Barebones he ignored.

Dicon was about to remark that he wished William to take part in the tour of inspection, but thought again and said nothing. William was capable of making his own discoveries ; particularly if there should be anything not meant to be seen. Dicon gave his thanks to the Governor, and with

Jeremy and James Challoner, followed him outdoors. The party came to a halt in the Square where stood the gibbet. Dicon looked at the foul tree distastefully. There seemed to be no escape from its grim presence and shameful implications.

Hebor Joslin sensed Dicon's unspoken disgust. He said: "An excellent deterrent, Mister Lovering. Let the evil doer know the penalty for his sins . . . and sin becomes abhorrent. Fortunately our citizens are law-abiding so the tree seldom bears fruit."

"'Tis as well," said Dicon. "I have seen enough of them, and their uses."

Hebor Joslin, with a sweep of his hand indicating the houses around the Square, said: "Let us forget evil. As you see, our houses are built around the Square. There"—he indicated the large building—"is our chapel, which is also a Meeting Place and Council Chamber. Our council is comprised of twelve members elected by the adult males of our community. Presiding over the Council is the Governor, also elected by the adult male members of the community. The Governor's term of office is for five years as opposed to the Councillors' two years' term of service. As you are aware, I am the present Governor and have three more years to serve.

"The largest building on the right is our storehouse and granary. I think you would care to inspect it. Our stores are not without interest."

The store-house was by far the largest building in the settlement.

The Governor was correct when he said his guests would find the stores of interest. Packed from floor to roof were the pelts of fur-bearing animals.

"These we have obtained by trade from the Indians," explained the Governor. "You will doubtless wonder why we have not yet traded them in Boston. We hold them against a higher price than is being paid at present. Such a time will come. Our granary too is well stocked."

When Dicon saw the vast quantity of wheat, enough to feed the folk of Perfect Peace for a period of years, he shook his head and then said frankly: "Surely, Governor, you err in holding so much grain? You run the risk of it deteriorating and, again, as it is more than you can possibly need, surely the surplus would be better turned into good money?"

"It is well stored, Mister Lovering. As a man of commerce you will appreciate our view when I say we have had three good harvests in succession. It is, therefore, extremely probable that this year will yield a poor return for our labours in the fields. Wheat will be scarce and therefore be dear to purchase. The Indians are notoriously improvident and will feel the pangs of hunger. Our wheat will command high bargaining value; most satisfactorily high."

James Challoner said airily : " Hence the artillery ! Hence the armed sentries. Hence the general preparations against a hostile world, Governor ? Indians may be, as you say, notoriously improvident, but if I have heard aright, they are also notoriously revengeful. At a rough guess, I would say you have reasons to anticipate trouble."

" And should it come, Mister Challoner, in no spirit of boastfulness, I say, should the Indians be so ill advised to attack us, they will have reason to rue their temerity. We have an adequate supply of powder and shot, water in plenty, food in plenty and the strength to withstand attack or siege. We are entirely self-sufficient, even to the manufacture of cloth. We have wool from the sheep from which to spin the yarn, and looms to weave the cloth."

" Admirable," said Dicon, " I congratulate you, Governor. But pray tell me, have you any suggestion which would make for our mutual benefit in commerce ? I would make it quite clear, however, that if it is in your mind to hold your merchandise in the hope of selling to us at famine prices, as you intend to exploit the Indians' hunger, then I can only say you will be disappointed. If I am over-candid I make no apology. It is my belief that frankness in commerce makes for honest dealing."

The Governor bowed. " I admire candour,

Mister Lovering, and I agree with your sentiments completely. I had no intention of suggesting trade with the House of Lovering on the lines which had occurred to you. I have a suggestion which would be greatly to our mutual benefit, but that I will put before you later on. Ha, here comes Hugh, the son of David Smith, one of our councillors. An excellent youth is Hugh. He will make the very companion for your nephew, Mister Lovering. Hey, Hugh ! ”

“ Yes, Sir.” Hugh came running.

“ Ah, Hugh, these gentlemen are guests of Perfect Peace. Are you idle this morning ? ”

“ No, Sir. At least, I am here for sentry duty in two hours’ time, otherwise I should be working on the land.”

“ Then, my boy, I suggest you give young Master Jeremy Wainwright your company. You could show him around our little domain. I am of the opinion that eager youth must find the companionship of his elders vastly irksome.”

Jeremy grinned, which was no true indication of his thoughts. But Hugh was a well-built, pleasant-looking lad of his own age and might well make a good companion.

Hugh said gravely : “ I shall be honoured, Sir.” Then he looked at Jeremy enquiringly.

“ It is very kind of you,” said Jeremy. “ Shall we go ? ”

Together the lads walked across the Square.

Dicon saw them pass from the settlement and out into the open country.

"That was very kind of you, Governor," said Dicon. He did not say why he thought it kind. He knew Jeremy's curiosity was aroused and Jeremy was no fool. The lad had a way of asking innocent-sounding questions which brought forth illuminating replies.

"I had begun to think," said Dicon, "until I saw the boy, that Perfect Peace had no inhabitants."

The Governor smiled. "Industry is our watch-word, Mister Lovering. By day the men and boys are at work in the fields and the women and maidens are either weaving or washing at the river outside the stockade. We have no idlers, Mister Lovering."

James Challoner said jokingly: "No, Perfect Peace begins to teem with life and bustling activity! Yonder go the mighty William Gammon and the imperturbable Barebones." Dicon chuckled. William and Barebones made an amusing picture. William proceeded across the Square with a truly nautical roll and a grin on his jolly red face, while Barebones, grave and unsmiling, glided rather than walked beside him. And Dicon Lovering felt that William had ventured out to take a look round for himself. William Gammon was a man whose eyes missed little, and when he put two and two together he never failed to make the total into four.

The Governor made no comment. He merely looked and said : " Would you care to see our weaving sheds ? I think, too, our armoury and powder magazine, would meet with your approval. The Indians are experts in the use of fire as a weapon of attack, consequently we have stored our powder below ground, with of course, proper precautions against damp."

*

*

*

Jeremy found Hugh a pleasant companion. He listened to his talk of land cultivation, his opinion of the various breeds of cattle and sheep grazing in the pasture, the growth of flocks and herds, the achievements of the men toiling in the fields, with not too great an interest. He said yes or no when he deemed the occasion warranted a word, and trusted he had used the right one at the right time.

When Hugh's flow of information wavered he asked : " Hugh, how and when do we hunt bears ? "

Hugh laughed : " Bears are plentiful. In another month's time we may hunt them. They have their cubs to tend to now, but the cubs will soon be big enough to look after themselves and so we may hunt them. There are all sorts of deer too. One species is huge. The Moose it is called. But 'tis best to have the Indians' help for they are wiser than white folk when it comes to hunting."

"We already have an Indian guide," said Jeremy. "It would be a great adventure to hunt a bear. I hope we shall stay here long enough to do so."

"But you will, of course you will, Jeremy," said Hugh quickly. "You are here to take part in our cause. Yes, you will stay."

Jeremy thought quickly and said: "I don't know. You see it depends on my uncle. I'm afraid I don't know anything about the cause."

"You will," said Hugh. "It is a wonderful cause. All will be peace; all will live in peace. This is a new country of great and untapped riches. We shall become so powerful that in the years to come the world will be obliged to accept our creed. First we shall obtain dominion over all Massachusetts . . . and . . . I know it will take years . . . longer than I shall live . . . but in the end there will only be peace in the world no place for dissension. Think of it, Jeremy Everywhere men working together in a common cause."

"I cannot understand how anyone should see a flaw in such an ideal. Yet I overheard the Governor say to my father that the Lady . . ."

Hugh closed his mouth with a snap and then said: "I should not have said that, Jeremy; be pleased to forget it. I had no right to speak upon what was no more than a fragment of conversation not meant for my ears."

Jeremy thought he caught a note of fear in Hugh's request.

"'Tis naught to do with me," he laughed. "Now if you will tell me about bears and wild animals you will indeed hold my interest."

Hugh gladly talked about bears.

*

*

*

James Challoner confessed, for the third time after supper, that he was puzzled.

"If," said he, "our good folk of Perfect Peace are withholding the fruits of their labour from the markets open to them, upon what do they live? I cannot, entirely, accept the Governor's boast that they are completely self-sufficient."

Dicon said: "The answer is a belt."

"A belt, Lovering?"

"To be sure, Challoner! An invisible form of support; one cannot see the belt that supports the breeches."

"Ah! Your point is taken, Lovering. I assume the belt is studded with precious stones."

"Exactly, Challoner. But to whom does the belt belong? Or is it a pirate's treasure or a robber's hidden hoard?"

"Or, my dear Lovering, a mysterious lady; a vanishing lady?"

"For whom, Challoner, we have only Robert Hamilton's unsubstantiated assumption. We have heard no word of her from the Governor."

Jeremy and William had been sitting and listening in silence, but suddenly William Gammon laughed loud and long.

"William," said Dicon mildly, "there is little diversion to amuse us in Perfect Peace. Let us, I beg you, share your joke!"

"Ho, ho, ho, Mister Dicon," William chuckled. "'Tain't a joke as I can share, leastways, 'tain't a joke at all. But it has got a funny side, that it has. 'Tis the talk o' pirates' 'oards and buried treasure what amuses me, 'ccs, some'ow, I don't believe 'em. An' then agen I'm willin' to make a small wager—say a crown—as she's got red 'air an' girt green eyes, proper lovely!"

"Who has red hair and girt green eyes, and is proper lovely?" asked Dicon.

"Ah," said William, "be y' willin' to wager a crown?"

"No, I do not make wagers," said Dicon, "but just tell us what bats flutter in your brain."

"B'ain't no bats, Mister Dicon. Red hair, green eyes—leastways they should be. Aye, an' they will be, I reckon."

"William," said James Challoner, "who has red hair and green eyes? We grow impatient."

"Your vanishin' lady," said William.

"You've seen her?" asked Dicon eagerly.

"'Course I ain't," answered William. "If I'd seen 'er I'd a bin certain sure and I'd a wagered five crowns. All the same, I reckons I be right."

“ William, are you trying to exasperate us ? ”

“ No, Mister Dicon, an’ what I knows makes it a sight bigger puzzle than ’twas afore, leastways if I be right, and I reckons I must be since I ain’t never wrong.”

“ Then who is she, man ? ”

“ Ah, seein’ as I can’t say for certain sure, I’d best say naught, same as you’ve said to folk hundreds o’ times, Mister Dicon.”

And try as they would, neither Dicon, James Challoner nor Jeremy could get another word out of William, though he chuckled to himself, hugging his secret with infuriating glee.

And from outside came thuds and bumps of a busy man at work. Barebones could not sleep soundly in a white man’s house. He was building his tepee.

CHAPTER IX

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

No amount of persuasion could move William Gammon. He said that he had no proof that his discovery, if discovery it was, solved anything of the much-discussed lady's identity. In fact William stated that there might even be no lady at all. But he made this statement with the air of a man who was playing the martyr in the cause of prudence.

Dicon, James Challoner and Jeremy kept their eyes wide open for a sight of the lady and their ears open for any word. But they had no reward.

The Governor spent a certain amount of his time in entertaining his guests, and, when he was not so doing, various members of the Council gave their services. And as chess, far too slow a game for Dicon's liking, was the only diversion they offered, he soon sickened of the sight and shape of the pieces and welcomed only one word, 'Mate', since it put an end to the game.

Neither Governor nor Councillor made any mention of commercial undertaking. They were content to offer their hospitality and the only form of recreation they knew, chess.

Said Dicon to James Challoner: "These folk are mighty polite, but has it struck you, Challoner, that except by night, we are never alone?"

"It has, Lovering, and mighty suspicious it is. What are they hiding? 'Tis something that they have no desire for us to find out."

William Gammon, however, was left to his own devices, and they would have appeared to be innocent enough to the most wide-awake observer. William did no more than loaf about the Square, lean against a building and casually whistle the air of an old West Country ditty, none too tunelessly either. As a variation to his whistling—an idler's occupation—he carved birds and beasts from odd pieces of wood he picked up.

He suffered no interruptions. The Square was invariably deserted, though occasionally he caught sight of womenfolk hurrying on some errand or other. These walked quickly past him with eyes downcast and avoiding his glance. They wished him no "Good-day."

Then there came an afternoon when Jeremy, who had been out in the open country with Hugh, came to him in the Square.

Said Jeremy: "The gun crews are going to practise gun drill, William. Hugh told me."

"Us'll see what they can do, Master Jeremy."

Together they wandered to the gate. Within minutes, six men paraded beside one of the guns and proceeded to drill and, as they warmed to their work with much shouting and dashing uncertainly around the weapon, William could not suppress a broad grin. And Jeremy found the

grin so infectious that he too grinned, not without reason.

Their amusement did not pass unobserved. The citizen who was in charge of the gun drill came over to them. An earnest man he was, and sensible. He spoke politely and as one genuinely seeking advice.

“Your smiles, gentlemen, tell me plainly we are at fault. While we are all well-skilled with musket, pistol and sword, the uses of artillery pieces are strange to us and, having no experienced instructor, we do our best to become proficient by trial and error.”

“Aye,” said William, “but if so be you was usin’ real charges there’d only be one trial and it’d be too late to discover y’r error. Y’ see, after y’ve discharged the piece y’ve got to sponge it out afore re-charging, and I don’t see y’ practising spongin’.”

“With water : sponge with water ? ”

“Aye, shipmate, with water ! Y’ see, after y’ve fired likely there’s some burning sparks of powder left in the barrel. So if y’ puts in another charge o’ powder the sparks’ll set it off with a bang . . . and the chap rammin’ in the charge ’ll get the rammer through him.”

The novice artillery man was staggered by William’s practical knowledge. “Friend, I thank you ! ” he cried. “Your presence here is Heaven sent. We have been fools indeed to tamper with

such deadly tools when our knowledge is nil. You are a man of experience ; I beg you give us the benefit of your skill lest we make other and greater errors."

" I be no gunner, ship-mate, I be a seaman—same as my young Master here—with no knowledge of artillery savin' what I've seen in battle. Do 'ee ask Mister Lovering. He knows all about cannons, and he'll tell 'ee, never fear."

" Friend, that I will do. I am indeed grateful for your words. Our Governor, too, will be grateful. I shall acquaint him of the services you have rendered us."

William laughed. "'Tis naught, ship-mate, us'll leave y' to your drill. Mister Dicon'll put 'ee right."

William and Jeremy strolled away. William chuckled: " Them two cannon 'ud be proper friends to the Indians if ever they did come down on this place ! "

" Uncle will show them the way of cannon," said Jeremy.

William nudged Jeremy urgently. " Step out, Master Jeremy. See that woman over there, carryin' a basket ? She'll be goin' to a house by t'other gate. Us must get there first. Come on ! "

Jeremy was taken aback. What did William want with an elderly woman . . . ? He could not know her. . . . But he strode out.

There was time to spare.

William whistled his West Country ditty.

Suddenly the woman stopped . . . looked . . . and her eyes opened wide in sheer astonishment.

"It . . . it . . . is . . . Oh, thank Heaven . . . It be William Gammon! What brings you here? 'Tis hard to believe! You can't be one of . . ."

William grinned. "Aye 'tis me, sure enough! And the young Master—he's Miss Sarah's lad—and Mister Dicon's here too; so if you be worritted—an' y' looks it—then y' don't have to worritt any more! You b'ain't here by yourself, Marion?"

"No, William, y' can be sure o' that, but nobody must see us talking together. I am afraid."

"Aye, 'tis understood, Marion. Leave y'r door open by night. . . . 'As her still got red hair?"

"'Tisn't red, 'tis bronze, gold bronze, and she's still as lovely. I'll go now, before 'tis noticed that I'm a talkin' to you. I'll leave the door . . . and . . . oh, I do thank God our own folk have come to us."

The elderly woman hurried away.

Jeremy, completely bewildered, watched her enter a small house on the extreme left of the Square, hard by the angle of the stockade.

With a struggle he found his tongue and began by saying: "William, I don't . . ."

"'Course you don't, Master Jeremy, an' this

ain't the time for talkin'. Walk, an' keep walkin' ; an' try to look as if nothin' 'ad 'appened ! ”

And thereupon William whistled tunelessly the air of the old West Country ditty and Jeremy joined in.

As they neared the guest house William said, “ Now look, Master Jeremy, that woman you saw was feared, mighty feared, and I want y' to help ! As a beginnin', we ain't goin' to tell Mister Dicon nothing ; as a beginnin', that's all. Y' see, Master Jeremy, I know Mister Dicon better than any livin' man. Quiet 'e is, none quieter, an' there's no man harder to set up—'tis a proper job to make him fight—'ceptin' for one thing. If 'tis a woman in trouble 'e only knows one way, an' mighty quick it is too. An' in this here case . . . 'tis more'n that. Y' see, 'er is his kin, and yours, Master Jeremy.”

“ Our kin, William ? ”

“ Aye, but don't 'ee interrupt, Master Jeremy. 'Us 'a' got to find out a bit first o' all, and then us'll see. I don't understand the whys and wherefores yet, 'tis a proper old mix-up and naught makes sense yet awhile. But this us does know : Marion's afeared, and she ain't the sort to be afeared o' nothing. Bless my soul, Master Jeremy, what's been a-goin' on fair beats me.”

“ And from all you've said, William, I'm not one scrap the wiser, but whatever it is I'm with you.”

“ Aye, I knew that afore I asked 'ee, but here's

the way of it. I've been thinkin', there'll be no moon for the next few nights. 'Twill be proper dark. Now, I wants you go get y'r uncle Dicon to give a sort o' supper and invite the Governor an' as many o' the folk he can get hold of. While they're all busy eatin' and talkin'—an' the women folk don't seem to go out o' doors—we can pay a visit to Marion . . . an' . . . oh, never mind who else."

"And why should my uncle do as I ask, William? He'll be curious, you know."

"I reckon if you tells him as we want to look into something, and we don't want anybody about, he'd trust us not to make fools of ourselves."

"I'll try, William."

"Aye!" Then William chuckled. "And you might ask y'r uncle, sort o' casual like, who be the Trevannions. Sort of say as I mentioned the name . . . folk as once or twice came to Langley Barton when he was a little lad and I was a youth. 'Twas a tragic sort of family, the Trevannions, Master Jeremy."

"An' there's one more thing, Master Jeremy. Seein' as Mister Challoner be a stranger, and what us 'a' been talking about—Marion and all—be a sort o' family business, I reckon 'tis best kept to ourselves. I mean there ain't no need for Mister Challoner to be mixed up in it."

"As you say, William. Though I confess I cannot make head or tail of all this rigmarole."

"Then don't try, Master Jeremy. 'Twill all be plain afore long. An' here's the guest house, so in us goes."

An hour later William looked at Jeremy meaningly and said: "I be goin' to have a look at that there tent Barebones calls a tepee and have a yarn with him, though 'twont be easy for he don't talk much."

Jeremy waited his chance and it came. James Challoner settled himself at a chessboard, placed the pieces and announced he intended working out a combination of moves which he believed would master the Governor at their next game.

Said Jeremy: "Uncle, would you take a turn around the Square with me?"

"Willingly, Jeremy, but ask me no questions upon the matter of hunting bears. I have never hunted bears nor do I wish to hunt 'em. Barebones is your man. He'll know, I'll warrant."

Together uncle and nephew strolled into the Square. "Well, Jeremy, now you've got me alone, out with it!"

"Was it so obvious, Uncle?"

"Not to anyone else, lad, but I know you."

"'Tis this way, Uncle. Could you give a party to the Governor and as many of the male folk as possible within the next two or three days? There won't be any moon then and 'twill be dark at night. And besides, we want all the menfolk engaged eating and talking: out of the way."

" Ah, Jeremy, 'twill be dark at night and you don't want to be interrupted in some nefarious scheme! Well, lad, out with it! "

" Well, Uncle, I don't know exactly, but William wants my help. He has discovered something, Uncle, something that is . . . is . . . oh, I don't know, Uncle, but it is terribly important and urgent. William won't say anything about it until he's sure. Uncle, you know William. He wouldn't do anything foolish."

" No, lad, William is no fool and he wouldn't land you in trouble. I'd trust William anywhere at any time. If he has some idea, it will not be crack-brained. Aye, lad, I'll do as you say, or try to. I'm convinced William has stumbled upon the key to a mystery." Dicon chuckled. " He offered to wager a crown the other night. William wouldn't make a wager if he were not certain of winning. I suppose, Jeremy, William made no reference to a . . . er . . . red-headed lady? "

" No, Uncle," and Jeremy paused for a second before adding: " Though William did make some mention of a lady, Uncle, but she was elderly and her hair was grey."

" "Um," said Dicon, " not only does he change the tune, he changes the colour."

" Oh, Uncle, William said also, he considered the matter should be 'twixt you, me and himself. Mister Challoner he said was—er—well, not one of us."

"Did he now, Jeremy! Ah well, doubtless William has excellent reasons. So be it! I shall be as oysterish as William himself."

Well satisfied with his success Jeremy steered the conversation into other channels and after a while asked: "Uncle, who are the Trevannions? William was saying they were a tragic family and kin of ours."

"Tragic indeed, lad! Their kinship comes by marriage. The old Lord Trevannion married Helen Lovering, great-aunt to your mother and myself. The Trevannions are, of course, Cornish folk—their name tells that—and they hail from Trevannion, a little bit of a place on the North Cornish coast.

"The old Lord Trevannion, who married Helen Lovering, had two sons, Arthur and Leonard, and when the war between King and Parliament broke, the two brothers took opposite sides. Arthur, the eldest, was for King Charles, Leonard for Parliament. 'Twas a terrible thing: brother against brother, and the Trevannions were not the only family to be so rent asunder.

"Leonard was killed at Marston Moor. The old Lord Trevannion died shortly afterwards. I heard the shock of his younger son's death broke his heart.

"Arthur stood firm for the King and when Cromwell's troops came to the West Country he held his place against them. There was a siege,

the place was bombarded and reduced to ruins and, somehow, Arthur escaped and got away to France. He returned to England on Cromwell's death and the Restoration of the Monarchy. The family place was little more than a heap of stones and—there was a lot of talk about this at the time—Arthur, now Lord Trevannion, was as poor as the proverbial church mouse. What he did with his wealth, for the Trevannions had vast possessions, no one ever knew and he never enlightened them.

“ Proud, stiff-necked he was. My father wished to help him but he would have none of it. And that reminds me of a peculiar truth, Jeremy, which you will discover for yourself. Those you wish to help are always too proud to accept it. It is those you know who are unworthy who will ever beg for financial aid.

“ However, Arthur died almost eighteen years ago. He left a little maiden ; Elspeth, I think was her name. She came, if I recall rightly, to Langley Barton when she was very young. I was but a small boy at the time and my memories are not clear, though I seem to recollect my father was greatly taken with her and so was William, who was a growing youth, about sixteen or seventeen at the time.

“ The Trevannions are a tragic family sure enough. My father was greatly disturbed because he was not permitted to help them. The maiden, Elspeth, so we heard, left the West Country and

went to the house of her mother's relatives in Northern England to be cared for.

"William is a soft-hearted sentimentalist, Jeremy. He has a way of recalling the past . . . little things long forgotten to all but himself. I do recall he was greatly taken with the little girl, fetching and carrying for her ; giving her piggy-backs and the like. Aye, and fetching and carrying for her formidable nursemaid.

"Bless my soul, Jeremy, I wonder what has happened to Elspeth ? I pray life has been kind to her."

They returned to the guest house and Jeremy was thoughtful, but his thoughts were jumbled and tangled ; without beginning or end.

James Challoner still pondered over his chess-board.

William sat hunched over a log-fire for the early summer night had grown chill. He looked up as Dicon and Jeremy entered.

Dicon smiled and said : " You know, Challoner, it would be no more than fitting if I should show some appreciation of the hospitality we are receiving, and at once. I think a supper-party to our hosts would not be inappropriate. I will mention it to the Governor this very night, in fact—now ! "

Dicon left the guest house, and Jeremy, his back to James Challoner, winked broadly at William.

CHAPTER X

INVITATION TO A FEAST

THE Governor welcomed Dicon warmly and led him into a living-room where there was neither comfort nor homeliness. As he entered, a woman of indeterminate years, drably garbed, rose from a cushionless settle beside the open hearth where a poor fire smouldered, and curtsied stiffly. Whether she was pleased, offended or merely indifferent to his visit, Dicon had no means of knowing. Her face was without expression ; quite emotionless.

Dicon bowed, professed himself to be her humble servant, and in return received another bobbing curtsy but no words.

Mistress Joslin, having considered the outward and visible signs of housewifely welcome adequate to the occasion, left the men to themselves.

“ Our womenfolk,” said the Governor, “ take no part in deliberations affecting the affairs of our community. Mistress Joslin has, quite naturally, anticipated your call upon me is to discuss matters of that nature. I venture to opine, in your kindness, you have come to offer your services for the furtherance of our efficiency in the . . . er . . . art of . . . er . . . gunnery ? ”

“ Not entirely, Governor. William Gammon has mentioned to me that your citizen soldiery are

a little inexperienced in the handling of artillery pieces, and what little knowledge I have, you may be sure, is at your disposal when, and where, you may require it."

"Thank you indeed, Mister Lovering. In naming you 'friend', I do not misuse a noble word. I pray you be seated."

Dicon accepted the invitation.

"And the other matter which brings you to my house?" the Governor asked as he took a seat.

"Ah yes," said Dicon. "Governor, I am deeply appreciative of the hospitality you have extended to my companions and myself, so, with your permission and help, I wish to make some small gesture indicative of my gratitude. I have a plan in mind; a poor enough scheme, yet it might serve to express the fact that the kindness we have received has not passed unheeded."

"My dear Mister Lovering, your feelings do you credit. I shall deem myself honoured if I can be of any assistance."

Dicon continued: "It is in my mind, Governor, to play host to the male members of your community. I wish to give a supper—a feast—if that is possible. And therein your help is needed. A large building would be necessary and then arises the matter of victuals. You, Governor, are in a position, which I am not, to make the necessary purchases. I can only supply the money, and that I do."

Dicon laid a purse before the Governor : " Here are twenty-five guineas. If you would entrust the sum to one who is capable of providing the feast, I should be further indebted to you for your goodness. I fear I am putting my request badly and the display of money is in poor taste, yet I am assured you will understand."

" Indeed, I do," said the Governor. " The generous purse is ample and I should be churlish to withhold what assistance lies within my power. Let us consider only the day, or evening, of the festivity."

" The sooner the better," said Dicon. " Procrastination is surely akin to vice ! "

" A man after my own heart," said the Governor. " Today is Tuesday. Friday ! Yes, Friday. All arrangements could well be made for that day. How think you ? "

" Admirable ! " replied Dicon, as he recalled to mind that the moon on Friday, or rather its absence, would be eminently suitable to Jeremy's purpose.

The Governor, with a sigh of satisfaction, settled himself more easily in his seat and then, leaning forward, he said earnestly : " Mister Lovering, if you are in no haste, the time would seem to be favourable to acquaint you with some of the aims and aspirations of our community. We have named our settlement Perfect Peace because to bring perfect peace to a troublous world is our destiny.

“ We are, Mister Lovering, a small band of brothers united in a great cause ; our dwellings are lowly and humble, our numbers are few, but we shall expand and, eventually, triumph. Have no doubt of it, Mister Lovering. Have faith ! ”

Dicon gave his full attention to the Governor.

“ There are two grievous sins, Mister Lovering, sins that are accounted but little in the outside world. They are Greed and Ambition. From these two deadly evils spring all worldly troubles. Eradicate greed and ambition and you have no reason for aught but Peace. And it is our intention to eradicate them, root them up and destroy them.

“ How shall we accomplish so great a task ?

“ To do so presents less difficulty than at first appears. We, here in Perfect Peace, have already done so : by self-denial and rigid discipline. All men, Mister Lovering, must be equal in all things. All men must be given equal reward for their labour, irrespective of the type of labour they perform. Thus there could be no covetousness. All men and all women must be uniform in dress. In no way must they differ. There again there can be no reason for discontent.

“ From small beginnings, Mister Lovering, from small beginnings . . . great good will come.

“ By self-denial, Mister Lovering, by unremitting toil and industry we shall acquire riches. Though that may seem incongruous after my

previous remarks, riches are essential in the beginning if we are to carry our creed further afield. Our object is to expand and establish ourselves in the cities and towns. Gradually, it is our aim to obtain control of the essential industries and commerce . . . and by so doing, control the lives of all engaged in the ways of earning a livelihood. We will force them into the absolute acceptance of our creed and way of living.

“ We are well aware we shall meet opposition, possibly violent opposition, and therefore the raising of an army will probably be involved, even as we are necessarily preparing in Perfect Peace, for an expected rising of the Indians against us.

“ The creation of an army is, of course, alien to our creed, since in Peace no armed force is needed. Further it would mean a departure from one rigid rule : equality of reward. For to ensure the support of soldiery it would be necessary to grant certain privileges, including higher payment. However, the end justifies the means and the maintenance of an army would be but a temporary measure. Given ten years, Mister Lovering, the whole of this new continent would be of our mind. All children would be schooled by compulsion, and in those schools the children would be taught one belief, one only : ours ! They would grow to know no other. There would be no alternative. Their minds would be our minds, their words, their

desires . . . as ours. There would be room for naught else. There could be no discontent."

The Governor's face was flushed, his words came quickly, his eyes were shining, and Dicon, realising the Governor believed every word he had spoken, was well-nigh dumbfounded. It was so incredible. . . yet, the Governor believed in his crazy creed. . . .

"You see, Mister Lovering, our plans are complete. It remains only to put them into operation.

"Mister Lovering, to you, on first sight, our task appears more formidable than it is in fact. Think you upon England in the year 1642. There was a country where King Charles sat safely upon the throne. Had anyone prophesied that within seven years, in January 1649, King Charles would have been executed, or Oliver Cromwell proclaimed Protector by the will of the people, who would have believed?

"If Oliver Cromwell could have achieved so much, in a country where the Monarchy was so firmly established, what can we not do in this vast country of isolated cities and towns and settlements of diverse interests and completely separate existences? We are in a minority, it is admitted, but we are an organised minority. We deal piecemeal with the unco-ordinated units of the majority and thus obtain dominion over the whole. What Cromwell did in England will be child's play here in the Americas."

At the mention of Cromwell's name Dicon wrinkled his nose and shrugged his shoulders in disgust.

The Governor was quick to note Dicon's expression, and looked at him questioningly.

"Naming Oliver Cromwell as an example, Governor," said Dicon, "was, perhaps, unfortunate. I will grant that he was an able man, a great man, but not a good man. A man who was a cheap cheat and who used religion as a means to fill his coffers earns no respect for his memory."

"Mister Lovering! What grounds have you for such outrageous assumptions?"

Dicon smiled tolerantly. "Assumptions, Governor? Nay, I assume nothing. I deal only with facts. As a beginning let me state Cromwell was not Cromwell. His grandfather was one Morgan Williams, a tenant tavern keeper on the Putney High Road, near to London. The tavern was then on the estate of Lord Essex.

"Morgan Williams made a deal of money, and the family moved into Huntingdon: there to brew beer. Their name Williams was not grand enough for them, so without a by-your-leave or a thank you, they purloined the family name of Lord Essex: Cromwell. Not exactly, my dear Governor, the act of simple country gentlemen as Noll Cromwell so frequently described his family.

"And again, you will recall, as Protector, Old Noll Cromwell put down, with a firm hand, the

drinking of wines in England. Wine, said he, was the Devil's liquor. Beer was the only drink for an Englishman. As a brewer of beer, Noll certainly benefited from his teachings.

"As Protector of England, I say nothing of him except that he became the most hated man in the country so that he went in fear of his life by day and night. Nor do I say aught of the tyranny with which he ruled his wife and family, save that they rejoiced when death claimed him. A man, Governor, who earns the hatred of his wife, his children . . . Well, need I say more ?

"Yes, I grant you he had ability, greatness . . . and was yet despicable."

The Governor looked at Dicon with a new respect. "You are well-informed, Mister Lovering. Noll Cromwell's . . . er . . . weaknesses are not generally known."

Dicon laughed. "Old Noll did not proclaim them from the house-tops. But the records of his birth and career exist for those who choose to read ! "

The Governor nodded and said : "We admit Cromwell's faults. He had chinks in his armour . . . unworthy weaknesses. But his principles were sound . . . as far as they went.

"However, Mister Lovering, you may remember I said that I saw in your advent to Perfect Peace the hand of Providence. Attend me, please. I have, I trust, made it amply clear that to achieve

our end, we must thrive and flourish in the realm of commerce. Your family is known. Your ships sail to every port east and west of England. The ramifications of your commercial undertakings extend over the known world. Mister Lovering, cast in your lot with us! Bring Peace to the world! If we can control the world's commerce we shall bring Peace."

Dicon looked the Governor in the eyes: "Governor, I am but my father's son. My father is the head of our family. Decisions affecting commerce and finance are made by him. I can but suggest, recommend or disapprove. I cannot make a final decision.

"I have listened to your words intently. The magnitude of your project is on a breath-taking scale and must be given much thought, which you may be assured I shall give. When I have come to some conclusion I will again discuss the matter with you with a view to communicating with my father."

"I had expected no other reply, Mister Lovering," said the Governor. "No sensible person would have answered otherwise. I will await the result of your deliberations with the patience born of confidence."

When Dicon left the Governor's house for the guest house his mind was awlirl.

The Governor believed, actually believed, that he would eventually control the lives, the minds,

the thoughts, the speech of the people of the Americas !

Dicon smiled as he thought of the folk who were to be so dominated. The freedom-loving, wholly independent Colonials with their wild enthusiasms and eagerness to build a new world of their own design subjected to a system which was little less than slavery.

It needed more imagination than Dicon possessed to envisage the likelihood. The Governor was crazed. That was the only possible conclusion he could reach.

Maybe it was the solitude of his existence, the absence of any contact with the bustling, striving life of young and rapidly growing cities, which had become a dark shutter keeping out the light of reason from his thoughts. Yet the Governor was sincere.

Would he have his followers ? Yes, Dicon thought he would. The malcontents, the failures, the idle, those unworthy of their salt, the haters of the industrious and the successful. The Governor's doctrine—equality of reward—would appeal to them.

And could the Governor's way succeed ? Men who had faith oft accomplished miracles. Not that the Governor would succeed, but he would attempt his plan, believing it was for good . . . for Peace. And therein lay the danger.

Dicon saw that only destruction could follow, and

being Dicon Lovering he put blame of the folly from his mind and thought solely of a means to avert what could only lead to inevitable disaster for the people of the Settlement.

CHAPTER XI

WILLIAM SOLVES THE MYSTERY

THERE was no moon and the time was eight-thirty of the clock. Dicon⁴ and James Challoner had taken themselves to the Council Chamber wherein the supper to the folk of Perfect Peace was being given.

All was quiet outside. William Gammon looked at Jeremy. "'Bout time us set about it, Master Jeremy. Mister Dicon said as 'e'd keep 'em talkin' for a goodish while. Now you knows what you've got for to do?'"

"Aye, William, I'll keep the sentries talking for ten minutes, and if anything goes wrong I'll whistle a tune."

"That's the way of it, Master Jeremy. The only men about 'll be on sentry duty at the gates, and as for the womenfolk—they'll all be indoors. Seems as they b'ain't allowed out o' doors save to run errands and go washin' by day, and not at all by night. Reckons as the time 'll come when they got to get leave o' the Governor to breathe fresh air."

Five minutes passed and Jeremy walked out into the Square.

He sauntered towards the stockade gate, humming cheerfully as he neared the gate.

"Stand! Who goes?"

The sentry was alert. His musket came up ready.

"Jeremy Wainwright," answered Jeremy.

The sentry lowered his weapon and said, pleasantly enough: "Are you not feasting tonight, young Master?"

"No," answered Jeremy, "I am too young to be sent to bed like a child and not old enough, or not considered old enough, to enjoy the pleasures of my elders."

The sentry laughed. "And there are those whose duties prevent them partaking of the feast. 'Twill be a great night for the folk of Perfect Peace."

"But not for us," said Jeremy. "Not knowing what to do with myself I came outdoors for a little exercise before going to my bed. Pray tell me, as the night is dark, how would you know of the approach of an enemy? I doubt, even if you were up in the watch-tower, that you could see far into the distance."

"Not far, 'tis true," answered the sentry, "but sight becomes accustomed to darkness and the range of vision is greater than you'd think. You may prove it yourself. Let us join my comrade on duty in the tower."

Gladly Jeremy followed the sentry up the ladder. William's task was made easy. The sentries would not be looking in his direction.

William waited a while and then crept silently

from the guest house. He paused and listened. No whistle from Jeremy. All was well.

For a man of his girth William moved with incredible speed and, equally incredible, he made no sound. Keeping in the shadows he prayed hard that Marion had remembered to leave the door unbarred.

Marion had not forgotten. The door opened at a gentle push, and closing it behind him, William saw a light shining through a partly closed door.

"Marion . . . Marion Hunkin . . . 'tis me . . . William Gammon."

The door opened.

"Come, William. We have been waiting for you."

Marion Hunkin took him by the hand and led him into the room.

Standing beside a chair, from which she had risen, stood a young woman. Her red-gold hair gleamed in the lamplight and her grey-green eyes were fixed on William.

William stood still and then: "D'ye mind me, Miss Elspeth? I mean, my lady. D'ye mind me as used to give 'ee rides . . . years a-gone when you was a little maid? I'd 'a' known 'ee anywheres. You're proper lovely—as you was when you was a little maid," cried William eagerly. "Proper lovely you be! I beg y'r pardon, me lady, I was thinkin' of you as a little maid . . . no disrespect . . ."

William faltered and shuffled his feet.

The Lady Elspeth Trevannion came to him and took his hands. "Oh, William, I do remember you, though you've grown so yast. 'Tis a great comfort to see you here; so big and so strong. Do not 'My Lady' me. I ain Elspeth Trevannion, a maid to whom you were kind and gentle, who needs your kindness more than ever."

"Then I do thank God, Miss Elspeth, that I be here, and I reckon I'm your man, to say naught o' Mister Dicon and Master Jeremy."

Elspeth smiled and there was gladness in her eyes. "William, tell me, how did you know I was here? And what brings you here?"

"Well, Miss Elspeth, when I sees Marion Hunkin, and though I thinks it mighty queer as her should be in this place, I reckons where Marion is, there'll you be too.

"Then for why us comes from Boston? 'Tis a long story, as Mister Dicon 'll tell 'ee, Miss Elspeth. But while we was in Boston, Mister Hamilton, as is the Loverings' agent there, tells us about a red-headed lady, mighty beautiful, who comes to Boston and goes to Perfect Peace and nobody hears no more about her. 'Course, when I sees Marion, well it wasn't exactly much a guess—'twas easy."

"William Gammon, Miss Elspeth's hair is not red," snapped Marion Hunkin.

"No, to be sure 'tis . . . but whatever 'tis, Miss Elspeth, I begs y'r pardon . . . 'umbly."

"It is red, William, red as flames, and please tell me more," laughed Elspeth.

"Well then. Mister Hamilton tells us about some jewels as 'a' been sold in Boston by the Governor o' this 'ere Perfect Peace, and . . . anyways, 'ere us be.

"But 'tis like this 'ere, Miss Elspeth. When I first saw Marion I reckon as she was a-feared and I ain't goin' to say as you ain't either. But if you be a-feared, then don't 'ee be no more, 'cos Mister Dicon and me, aye and young Master Jeremy who be Miss Sarah's son, will look after 'ee."

Elspeth took Marion Hunkin's hand. "William, Marion and I are afraid—no, have been afraid. We are, you see, prisoners. We saw no likelihood of ever returning to England. We are not harmed. We are treated courteously, but . . . we may not leave."

William's eyebrows met in a threatening frown.

"I'm lookin' for the man as'll say you nay, Miss Elspeth. But why? What be the reason?"

"Jewels, William," said Elspeth simply. "The Governor keeps my jewels in safe custody."

William Gammon scratched his head, stroked his chin, shuffled and looked what he was: a man unable to believe his own ears.

"You . . . a prisoner, Miss Elspeth?" he stammered. "'Tain't to be thought on no ways. Somebody be fair askin' for trouble, and they ain't goin' to be disappointed!"

“ William, let me tell you the whole story so that you may understand,” said Elspeth.

“ Aye, aye, Miss Elspeth.”

Elspeth began : “ You will remember, William, that my father held Trevañion for King Charles. You will remember too, that after the defeat he escaped to France and that he returned to England on the restoration of the Monarchy following the death of Oliver Cromwell.”

“ Aye, Miss, that I do.”

“ You may have also heard, William, that we were desperately poor, so poor that when my father died I was forced to accept the charity of my mother’s kinsfolk.”

William said nothing.

“ At the time, William, I had no knowledge that my father had made provision for what he felt was inevitable ; the failure of King Charles to establish himself in England during Cromwell’s lifetime.

“ Though he expected disaster my father felt that it was his duty to support the King’s cause, so he did. But he had prepared for the worst. He converted all his wealth into jewels, and those jewels he hid away where none could find them. Only one man knew of their whereabouts, a man my father trusted implicitly. He was Simon Greenstock, my father’s steward.

“ When my father returned to England the jewels had vanished ; and so had Simon Greenstock.

"Then, two and a half years ago, I received a letter from Simon Greenstock. He was dying. He confessed that he had stolen the jewels . . . and he too had hidden them. He told me the secret of their hiding-place.

"Now you know why I came here, and Marion with me. Simon Greenstock, after the theft, came to the Americas. He settled in Perfect Peace."

William drew his breath in a long-drawn whistle of amazement.

Elsbeth continued: "Simon Greenstock confessed his theft to the Governor but he did not disclose the hiding-place.

"That much I learnt on our arrival at Boston when Governor Joslin met, and escorted us, here. We found the jewels where Simon Greenstock had hidden them. The Governor took charge of them . . . for safety's sake. Since then, and with my knowledge, he has sold three stones, as payment from me for our keep."

Elsbeth paused and said: "And that is why I am—no, have been afraid. My jewels, William, are of immense value and would be of great assistance to the Governor in carrying out . . . a plan. . . ."

William nodded. "Aye, Miss, I've heard tell o' that plan. 'Tis a crazed notion. Mister Dicon knows all about it."

"I have spoken of going home, but the Governor

always finds reasons why I should not, and he is forever trying to persuade me . . . to . . .”

William interrupted : “ To join ’im in that daft cause, eh, Miss Elspeth.”

“ Yes, William.”

“ Then don’t take any mōre account o’ what ’e says. I’ll have a yarn with Mister Dicon, so don’t ’ee worrit any more, me pretty dear . . . beg pardon, I means, Miss Elspeth. You was a pretty little maiden and now you be a pretty lady, kinswoman to Mister Dicon too. Us b’ain’t goin’ to have ’ee worritted, nor yet you, Marion, though, come to think on it, you chased me about when I was a bit of a youth. Proper cruel you was.”

“ Get along with you, William Gammon,” said Marion. “ Good box on the ears would do you good even now.” Then her voice softened : “ But seeing that you’ve made Miss Elspeth smile, I’ll forgive you a lot. And I won’t say that seeing you again, especially as you’ve grown to be so big and mighty strong looking, ain’t greatly comforting, because it is. Yes, I think our troubles are over. What do you intend to do, William ? ”

“ Tell Mister Dicon first of all,” said William, “ but I reckons us’ll ’ave to go careful . . . cunning like. Now, I sees it this way, you best meet Mister Dicon accidentally-like-on-purpose. Mister Dicon had better way hang around. He sees ’ee, he recognises ’ee . . . makes himself **known**. Y’ recognises ’im . . . and if there’s

anybody about all the better. 'Twould be natural like. Once you've met accidentally-on-purpose, well, Miss Elspeth be Mister Dicon's kinswoman and there y' are. 'I don't suppose as that'll please the Governor, as 'e 'spos Mister Dicon's goin' to join 'im in that there crazed scheme of 'is. So cunnin' it's got to be and cunnin' it will be."

* * *

When Dicon returned to the guest house with James Challoner, William and Jeremy were fast asleep.

"An excellent supper, Lovering," said James Challoner. "I congratulate you. And I was greatly impressed by the Governor's speech. A wonderful notion. And what an idea! Peace throughout the world."

"Yes," said Dicon, "I gathered you were impressed. I also thought, and you must pardon me for saying so, that you were a little precipitate. After all, to stand up and offer your support wholeheartedly, your family substance included, is perhaps a little unwise."

"Unwise, Lovering? My dear fellow, the Governor is an idealist."

"Agreed, Challoner, yet it is advisable to consider an ideal. Is it practicable? I have been approached by the Governor . . . and I am considering the matter."

"I need no further consideration," said James

Challoner with enthusiasm. "The Governor is right. My every instinct tells me, nay commands me, to follow him. I pledge myself, my fortune, all I possess to his cause. Peace, Lovering, and brotherly love!"

"Um," said Dicon, "I am a great believer in peace. Wars do no good to victor or vanquished. It brings naught but misery."

"Aye, I knew you felt like that, Lovering. You will be with us."

"I want peace," said Dicon, "that is why I advise consideration of the ways of removing the causes of strife."

That night sleep did not come easily to Dicon Lovering.

CHAPTER XII

JEREMY MAKES A FRIEND

DICON heard all that William had to say, and when William came to an 'end with, "... an' there y' are, Mister Dicon!" he said:

"Surely I must be dreaming! I cannot believe this astonishing news which you have just recounted. Elspeth Trevannion . . . here . . . jewellery—precious stones . . . virtually a prisoner . . .? Very well, we accept the situation, William, and though I am flabbergasted, and well-nigh stricken dumb, we must act. I am inclined to favour your plan, the accidentally-on-purpose meeting. Yes, William, that is the way of it. As cunning as any fox, William, shall we be."

"Aye, aye, Mister Dicon, gently it goes. And here comes Master Jeremy, musket under 'is arm with that there Barebones. Now what be the lad up to now?"

"Well, Jeremy," said Dicon, "whose sudden death do you desire? You look remarkably warlike."

"Barebones is taking me to shoot, Uncle. Perhaps we may see a bear, but we shall certainly meet with buck. Barebones is confident."

Dicon looked at Barebones enquiringly. The Indian grunted and gave one of his rare smiles.

"Um," said Dicon, "so you would shoot bear

or buck? So be it, my lad. But have a care! Bears, I believe, have a strong dislike of being shot at; they have been known to lose their tempers. You are aware, Jeremy, that angry bears have no respect for man's boast—that he is a superior being? Strange is it not that they should show so little discernment?"

Jeremy grinned as he said: "I'll be careful." His uncle's love of banter was not new to him.

Barebones smiled again. It was reassuring. It told Dicon that the Indian accepted full responsibility for Jeremy's welfare. He knew not why, but he trusted the taciturn Indian.

Jeremy set off with Barebones at his side. Since it was day-time, a youthful sentry, a lad of not more than thirteen, kept watch and gave the two a greeting and wished them fortune.

"The boy will be all right with Barebones, William. I would trust him, I think, anywhere," said Dicon.

"Aye, Mister Dicon, 'e don't say much, but I reckons 'e's a good 'un—honest too. If 'e'd been a wrong 'un 'e could 'a' thieved our stores as easy as kiss me hand, but 'e didn't."

Jeremy and Barebones passed men working in the field. They looked up, and some, more affable than their fellows, waved and asked to be remembered if the hunting was fortunate. Bear steak, and plenty of it, was the popular demand.

Jeremy did not notice it at first, but when they

reached the edge of the forest country, he realised that Barebones, in some indefinable way, had changed. He moved easily, silently, and he was alert; that was what Jeremy noticed most—his alertness. And his face too had changed. For it was no longer expressionless. His eyes were alight and never still, looking here, there, everywhere. . . .

Then, without warning, Barebones stopped dead in his tracks. He touched Jeremy's shoulder. Jeremy stopped, scarcely breathing.

Barebones motioned him to follow. Jeremy was a good pupil. He made no sound. Again Barebones stopped, and Jeremy saw it—a great and splendid buck, a noble creature with head held high, suspicious of approaching danger and sniffing the wind. The sun slants, filtering through leafy branches, gleamed upon his brown hide.

Jeremy slowly and silently raised his musket. It came to his shoulder.

He aimed. Surely he could not miss so huge a target . . . ? He held his breath . . . squeezed the trigger . . . not hard enough. He held his fire.

Ten . . . twenty seconds. . . .

"I can't, Barebones," cried Jeremy, as he lowered his musket.

The buck flung his antlered head high, started, and was gone—a brown shadow that disappeared into the tall timber.

Jeremy, his face scarlet with shame, stammered :
“ I know, Barebones ! I know ! Call me a girl . . . but . . . 'twas so fine . . . wouldn't have been right to kill . . . for nothing.”

Barebones looked down upon Jeremy. “ I hoped you would not. I did not think you would. You were not hungry, so there was no need to kill.”

“ Oh, you understand, Barebones. I've never seen a buck before and he looked so grand, so proud. You don't think I'm like a girl after all, do you ? ” Jeremy broke off and then said in astonishment : “ Barebones, you are speaking English as well as I do ? ”

“ I speak English, certainly. I do not usually speak your language as it should be spoken, because an Indian guide is not expected to do so. If I did not say ‘ Huh ’ or ‘ How ’, or call the English ‘ palefaces ’, I should not obtain employment. Employment is very necessary as I must earn sufficient money to enable me to continue my studies.”

Jeremy was taken aback. Barebones's statement had been completely unexpected.

“ So you have to study ! Well, whatever it is, and all forms of study are bad enough, it cannot be so bad as the Science of Navigation ! What are you studying, Barebones ? ”

“ Theology,” said Barebones. “ I wish to become a clerk in Holy Orders so that I may go

among my own people and bring them to the true belief. My people believe in God, though they call Him the Great White Spirit, but they do not know of Our Lord.

“ I would they should know of Him and His teaching. My people are like children, with the minds of children. There is much good in them, but like children they are irresponsible and fanciful, and given to violence when wiser council should prevail. They are quick to anger, sometimes justifiably, sometimes without justification : then they will not see reason. They have many faults, but none which the teachings of Our Lord will not correct. I shall but sow the seeds, yet, in the years to come, the harvest will be gathered and my people will know no want.”

Jeremy saw a new Barebones indeed. How could he look upon him as a guide, a servant ? And how should he address him ?

A little nervously he said : “ When do you study ? ”

“ In the winter when the snows come,” answered the Indian. “ In the spring and summer I find employment guiding the white people. The money I earn, I use for my keep in the winter. My tuition is given freely by the Reverend John Hill of Boston.”

Jeremy waited a moment before speaking and then he said thoughtfully : “ It is right that you should teach your own people, and you will

succeed where white men would fail. I have heard that your people do not trust us and, if it is true that we drive them from their own land and pay only meagre compensation, then what else can we expect ?

" I think it is very fine of you to become a Holy Clerk, but you are a good man, anyone can see that by looking at you. Can I tell my uncle and William, or do you wish we keep your story as a secret between ourselves ? "

" As you wish, but perhaps it would be as well if, for the time being, no more was said."

Jeremy agreed, and thanked Barebones for confiding in him, and then he said : " You won't tell Uncle Dicon that . . . I . . . had not the heart to kill that buck ? "

Barebones smiled. " I will not, yet I believe your uncle would not be surprised. He is young, no older than I, but he is a man of experience and understanding and, I believe, would have behaved as you did had he been in your place."

That Barebones and his uncle were of the same age also came as something of a surprise to Jeremy. He had imagined Barebones to be much older. He concluded that it was Barebones's habitual air of gravity that gave the impression of greater age.

Jeremy had much to think about as he returned with Barebones to Perfect Peace. As they came to the cultivated land, the men at work called and asked when they were to eat bear steak.

Jeremy answered truthfully. He took the jokes against himself which followed in good part and with a grin.

Then, passing a wheatfield, Barebones pointed and said : " You see, it is sparse and poor. There has been no rain. For some years the yield has been abundant. This year the yield will be poor and men will go hungry, save those of Perfect Peace where the granaries are already completely filled.

" My people will return to this, their district, within the next moon to trade for corn."

Jeremy looked up quickly. " You mean, the folk of Perfect Peace will demand high prices for food—trade on man's need to eat ? "

Barebones nodded.

" My uncle may have something to say about that," said Jeremy.

" Your uncle could influence the folk of Perfect Peace ? They are hard."

Jeremy said, as if the words needed no explanation : " Of course. He is a Lovering."

" Are the Loverings powerful ? "

Jeremy answered : " That I cannot say. But this I know, if the people of Perfect Peace wish to trade with the seaboard cities, they will do well not to cross my uncle's will. He would not countenance the exploitation of hunger to aid commerce. I believe he is aware that the Governor means to drive hard bargains with your people."

"Then I pray his intervention will succeed, for should it not, and the Governor cannot be deterred from his course, there will be bloodshed. Starving men are not likely to listen to reason."

"Do not worry," said Jeremy brightly. "You would not if you knew my uncle. He has a knack of getting his way despite opposition."

"It is my hope that your uncle's success will continue," said Barebones.

They returned to Perfect Peace, passing through the stockade gateway and into the Square.

Jeremy saw Dicon and William, standing beside the Governor, watching six men of Perfect Peace practising artillery drill under the instruction of Mister James Challoner.

Dicon looked mildly interested and slightly amused. William frowned and the Governor looked well satisfied.

And, upon seeing the drill for himself, Jeremy felt there was every reason for the Governor's satisfaction. It was very obvious that Mister Challoner knew a great deal more of artillery pieces than could have been assumed from what little he had said and, further, he had the ability to pass on his knowledge.

The gun's team was keen to learn the way of handling the weapon and James Challoner had the way of controlling it. Under his guidance the men went through the motions of loading, sighting and firing very creditably. They worked swiftly,

smoothly, and with few errors. With further practice they would become a gun team in which the most exacting instructor could take pride.

For a quarter of an hour, or thereabouts, Jeremy watched the drill and then James Challoner raised his hand and declared the practice was finished for that day.

He walked over to the Governor, smiling, and the Governor congratulated him upon the team's progress, which he described as remarkable and due entirely to the knowledge and patience of the instructor.

James Challoner depreciated his own part, saying the men were excellent material. He added, respectfully, that it was a pity the ammunition in store was only ball. "If ever we should—and I pray it will not come to pass—be obliged to use the weapons, it will be against men, and in that case scatter shot, bar and chain, would prove more effective. Ball is best for the destruction of land fortifications or the sinking of ships. I doubt not we can improvise, however. We have lead in the magazine and armoury, and with the use of fire to melt it we can fashion our missiles to our own needs."

Dicon and William came forward.

"An exhibition of extreme merit, Challoner," said Dicon. "You have greater knowledge of artillery uses than with which I credited you. No

professional soldier or sailor could have bettered your instruction."

"You flatter me, Lovering! What little I know I have picked up—I am naturally observant—upon my travels which I mentioned to you. I am overjoyed to be of use, since I am heart and soul with our Governor in his noble cause." He turned to the Governor, bowed and said: "And I must inform you I have written to my bankers in England requesting that funds shall be expedited to us here, and would remind you of your promise to arrange for the despatch of the letter."

"Certainly, my dear Mister Challoner. Let us do so at once."

The Governor and Challoner bowed to Dicon and took their leave.

"Um," said Dicon, "um! Our Challoner is something of a surprise. A gunner of some merit and a man whose stomach does not turn in a hurricane. You will recall sea-sickness had no terrors for him. His travels must surely be more extensive than we had imagined!

"And, Jeremy, so pleased is our worthy Governor with Challoner's ability he has been given command of the Perfect Peace garrison."

"Then, Uncle, 'tis a duty that will not sit upon your shoulders."

Dicon smiled and said: "Which will give me time to accompany you upon bear-hunting expeditions. I take it you have returned for horses

and a cart to retrieve the monstrous bear you shot and have left in the woods. I should be grateful for its hide. A bear-skin rug before the hearth is warm to the feet and possesses a peculiar decorative value."

Jeremy flushed.

"Nay, lad, don't tell me you have had no success? Do not tell me it escaped you?" Dicon's eyes were twinkling.

"I didn't see a bear, Uncle Dicon, let alone shoot one," said Jeremy, "and I beg you stop teasing."

Dicon laughed outright, then William joined him and even Barebones covered his mouth with his hand.

Jeremy strode away. Barebones followed him.

"William," said Dicon, "the Governor's scheme for the future is crazed: it is foredoomed, yet Mister Challoner has accepted it. Despite this, William, Mister Challoner gives me the impression that he is a man of intelligence. Think you an intelligent man would pledge himself to a cause that cannot succeed?"

"Maybe 'e ain't so intelligent as us thinks, Mister Dicon, or maybe the plan ain't crazy . . . or . . . maybe . . ."

"Maybe what, William?"

"Maybe Mister Challoner *is* intelligent. Maybe the scheme be crazy, and I reckon it is; then in that case, Mister Challoner must have got ideas

of his own. There's something as he reckons he can get out of it."

"That, William, is a very intelligent observation. It must be, since it coincides with my own!"

CHAPTER XIII

DICON PLAYS HIS PART

DICON looked at Jeremy and Jeremy looked at him.

"Jeremy," said Dicon, "the time is eleven of the clock, and our good companion, Challoner, is now exercising the gun team. Most praiseworthy! The time approaches when we must take the air. Marion Hunkin may be about on some fortuitous errand and I am anxious to display my talent for acting. In short, Jeremy, to mum as no mummer has ever before mummied: if mummers indeed mum, which I take leave to question."

"So long as you looks proper surprised and folks believes you be surprised, Master Dicon, it don't make what odds you calls it," observed William.

"I remarked yesterday, William, that you are a man of supreme intelligence and your words now give further proof of my judgement," said Dicon. "And now, pray tell me how you intend to occupy your time this fine morning."

"Me and Barebones be goin' to take a look at the countryside, Mister Dicon. Better way I'm not with y' when you goes rushin' up to Marion."

"Agreed, William. Now then, Jeremy, ready?"

"Aye, Uncle Dicon."

William went in search of Barebones, and Dicon and Jeremy strolled easily into the Square. James Challoner was busy. So were the six men who were in the process of being trained in the arts of gunnery. James Challoner rapped out the words of command and followed them with a spate of encouragement or condemnation.

The Governor stood by and watched.

Dicon whispered to Jeremy: "Don't forget, lad. Nudge me should Marion Hunkin come into view. I fear I shall not recognise her after so many years."

Then they joined the Governor, wishing him good day and praising the efforts of James Challoner and the six men who were being given no opportunity to rest.

"A man," said Dicon, indicating James Challoner, "of boundless energy. I trust his pupils are sufficiently appreciative."

Jeremy kept his face straight. Dicon was in a mood to banter.

The Governor, to whom jokes were foreign, took Dicon seriously and declared that men of Perfect Peace could only be appreciative and grateful. "A man amongst men," said the Governor of James Challoner. "He is with us as I know you will be. I have placed him in charge of all our defences. A remarkable man, Mister Lovering. He intends to manufacture the type of ammunition we may need should we suffer attack

from the Indians. A remarkable man, indeed. This very day I have sent a messenger to Boston bearing a letter from him to his bankers. Two thousand pounds he is donating to our cause. A man of substance, Mister Lovering."

"So it would seem," said Dicon, "and generous. I wish I had known you were sending to Boston for I would have written to our agent, Mister Hamilton, on a small matter of business."

The Governor was about to answer when Jeremy nudged Dicon. On the other side of the Square a woman, carrying a basket, came from a house and was making her way to the South gate.

Dicon gave a cry of surprise. "It can't be . . . yes . . . it is . . . it must be! It *is*! It is Marion Hunkin!"

Dicon dashed away and the Governor watched him, blinking in amazement.

It was as well that Marion Hunkin had been prepared.

"Marion, Marion Hunkin!" shouted Dicon. "What are you doing here?" He seized her hands, the basket fell and Dicon whispered, "Dicon Lovering, remember? Pretend you are amazed . . . and don't be surprised at anything."

"Master Dicon, my very dear soul," cried Marion. "You here!" Marion acted well.

So did Dicon. "And you used to spank me," he shouted for all to hear, "when I was a bit

of a lad . . . aye, and kiss me too . . . so I'll have a kiss now for old time's sake ! ”

And Dicon gave her a smacking kiss and was kissed soundly in return.

Dicon laughed with joy' and said excitedly : “ But if you are here, where is my kinswoman, Elspeth ? You swore you would never leave her ! ”

“ The Lady Elspeth is here, Mister Dicon. Right glad she will be to know it too, though what brings you here is a great mystery.”

The gun team had stopped its activities. James Challoner had eyes only for what he saw, and the Governor, recovering from his astonishment, made quickly for Dicon and Marion. Jeremy followed and the manner in which he checked a laugh can only be deemed heroic : a noble effort.

“ Mister Lovering ! ” cried the Governor indignantly. “ You may be ignorant of our ways, but to embrace a woman is unpardonable.”

Dicon laughed : “ Embrace a woman ? I'll embrace Marion whenever I see her. I am a privileged person. I'll warrant she has not spanked you ! She has spanked me many a time. And what is more, there is yet another I must greet, Governor. Why ever did you not inform me my kinswoman, the Lady Elspeth Trevannion, is here in Perfect Peace ? Bless my soul, it is a great surprise, but a greater pleasure. We have no word of her for years.”

Acting or not acting, Dicon played the role of joyful kinsman in a way that was certainly convincing. With boyish enthusiasm he smacked the Governor on the shoulder as he shouted his delight. And it was a smack that caused the Governor's knees to wobble and shook some of the breath from his lungs.

"Your kinswoman . . . the Lady Elspeth . . . and Marion Hunkin . . . nurse to you both I doubt not. Indeed your . . . er . . . natural pleased excitement excuses the . . . er . . . deviation from our customs," said the Governor breathlessly.

He turned to Marion. "Leave us now, Marion Hunkin. I will discuss the . . . er . . . future with Mister Lovering."

Dicon, quite irrepressible, kissed Marion on both cheeks and bade her give his love and assurances of devotion to his kinswoman.

"Wonderful, Governor, wonderful! Most amazing! Elspeth above all people . . . here! Is her hair still red . . . and her eyes green?"

James Challoner had joined them. He missed no word that was spoken. Jeremy was fighting a hard battle with the laughter that tried to break from his lips.

"Amazing, Mister Lovering, amazing!" said the Governor.

"Well, I must go to see Elspeth," laughed Dicon. "I'll give her a surprise."

The Governor touched Dicon's sleeve. "Not yet, Mister Lovering. You must not call upon your kinswoman so unceremoniously. Dear, dear, the eagerness of youth! You must allow me to inform her of your presence here. Also according to our law an unmarried woman may not be seen alone. Allow me, my dear Mister Lovering, to make the necessary arrangements. If it is convenient to her, and she is willing to receive you—shall we say this afternoon?"

"As you will, Governor," replied Dicon.

"I will go to her now," said the Governor.

"What is all this, Lovering?" asked Challoner.

"Does it mean the mysterious lady mentioned by Robert Hamilton is your kinswoman?"

"None other," replied Dicon. "When Robert spoke of her, little did I think that she was the Lady Elspeth Trevannion. Someone truly said the world is a small place!"

"Amazing is the word," said James Challoner. "I . . . wonder . . . it may be . . ." He broke off.

"Yes?" queried Dicon.

"Oh, nothing," laughed James Challoner, "at least nothing that matters. I am, I fear, too astonished to think clearly."

"In that," said Dicon, "you are not alone."

And while Dicon stood in the Square, William Gammon stood upon a hill beside Barebones. Barebones pointed away to the distant hills.

"Can't see it," grunted William, "an' I reckons my eyes be good."

William stared, and suddenly, "Aye. Smoke! I can see it."

"The camp-fires of my people," said Barebones. "One week, they come to trade with white men."

"Aye," said William, "and a bit one-sided it'll be. Anyway, there 'tis!"

*

*

*

Jeremy accompanied Dicon and the Governor to call upon Elspeth Trevannion for, as Dicon said, Jeremy was also her kinsman and she would certainly wish to hear of the lad's mother from his own lips.

The Governor, as he conducted them to the little house where Elspeth lived with Marion Hunkin, put on an air of heavy joviality; the role of the benevolent all-powerful relative who, by some magic process, unites long separated kinsfolk with a mere wave of the hand. He tut-tutted, vowed the situation was remarkable, unprecedented and to anyone who had not the actual evidence before his eyes, pardonably incredible.

Marion opened the door to the knock, bobbed a curtsy, saw Dicon's wink (he was standing behind the Governor) and probably regretted she could not return it.

Elspeth, having been prepared for the visit, rose from her seat to greet them. Dicon made his bow. He became the complete gentleman of fashion. His bow was an intricate thing of modish elegance which would have tested even the gallant James Challoner to equal. He vowed himself to be enchanted, charmed, her obedient, humble and devoted servant, together with all the usual conventional insincerities customary in polite society.

And the Lady Elspeth was not to be outdone. She was the 'grand lady indeed. Her curtsy, as Dicon raised her hand to his lips, was as deep and graceful as any ever seen at the Royal Court. She too proclaimed her delight in the fashionable extravagance of the day, to meet her kinsman in such unusual circumstances.

Then, with the normal and accepted forms of greeting concluded, with a laugh of carefree joy, Dicon flung his hat into a corner of the room. "Now, cousin," he cried, "let us have done with such polite nonsense. I am your cousin Dicon and I joy to see you again." And taking her by the shoulders, he kissed her on both cheeks to the delight of Marion and the disapproval of the Governor.

"Mister Lovering . . ." he began.

Dicon slapped him—harder than he had upon the previous occasion—most cheerfully upon the shoulder. "Why," he laughed, "this is an event which can only happen once in a lifetime. Have

I not found my lost kinswoman, and is she not as lovely as she promised to be as a little maiden ? ”

“ Cousin Dicon, I vow . . . ” said Elspeth, but Dicon laughed away what she would have said. The Governor was quite speechless.

“ And now, dear Cousin,” said Dicon, “ the shy youth you see before you is my nephew, Jeremy, Sarah’s son. I beg to present him to you. My Lady Elspeth, may I have the honour to present to your notice, Master Jeremy Wainwright. Jeremy, my boy, Lady Elspeth Trevannion.”

Dicon performed the presentation with great ceremony . . . but could not stifle the laugh in his voice.

Jeremy made his bow very creditably, and vowed himself “ My Lady’s servant.” And Elspeth, having muttered and smiled the polite words in keeping with the occasion, laughed and said :

“ And now I am your cousin Elspeth and you my cousin Jeremy. You have a look of your mother, Cousin Jeremy. She was ever kind to me as a little maiden. Now, Cousin Dicon, pray tell me how come you to Perfect Peace ? ”

Dicon told her the truth, save that he made no mention of the jewels. He told of his project—the expansion of trade to benefit the House of Lovering.

“ And now, Cousin,” he said, as he came to an end, “ I would have your story, for I am vastly intrigued and would know the reasons which have brought us together after so many years.”

Elspeth told her story : the bare facts and no more. She gave no explanation as to why she had not returned to England on the recovery of her father's treasure.

"Amazing," said Dicon, "amazing ! Bless my soul, who would believe it ? Astonishing. Absolutely amazing !"

The Governor, his breath having returned to his body, smiled benignly.

"Mister Lovering, I must also tell you that your kinswoman, the Lady Elspeth, is a firm supporter of our ideals. She has pledged her whole-hearted support and, as a token of her belief in our aims and ultimate triumph, she has placed her fortune at our disposal."

Dicon's eyes were upon Elspeth.

She spoke : "That is so, Cousin Dicon."

And Dicon Lovering knew that the Lady Elspeth Trevannion was lying for some reason, and he made instant decision to discover that reason.

He said simply : "Well, Governor, if my cousin is convinced of the truth of your cause, that is sufficient for me. I am with you."

The Governor seized Dicon's hand. "I knew ! I knew !" he cried. "Did I not say your coming was providential ?"

Dicon said he had, and he thought it was indeed providential but he kept his thoughts to himself. He caught a glimpse of Marion's face. He was

even more certain than that Elspeth was not, as the Governor had said, whole-hearted in support of, what he called, the ideal.

The Governor then said that they had taken up too much of the Lady Elspeth's time. Dicon and Jeremy made their adieus and Dicon said: "I will call upon you tomorrow, Cousin—with your permission—for we have much to talk about and which will pass the time quite pleasantly."

"Mister Lovering, come, come!" said the Governor chidingly. "I fear you cannot make appointments so lightheartedly. The laws of Perfect Peace do not permit meetings between the sexes . . . even when they are akin."

Understanding came to Dicon.

"Laws, Governor? The laws of Perfect Peace do not apply to either my cousin or myself. We are but visitors enjoying your hospitality."

"Nevertheless, Mister Lovering, you must obey our laws."

Dicon smiled, a slow smile, and Jeremy, who knew that smile so well, waited to hear what would come somewhat impatiently.

"Governor," said Dicon, "I trust no one will be foolish enough to try to prevent me; that is, of course, if my cousin is agreeable."

"Be assured, I shall always be delighted to receive you, Cousin Dicon," said Elspeth.

"You hear, Governor?" said Dicon. "I beg you relax your laws in this matter. The proprieties

will be observed; Marion Hunkin makes the admirable chaperon."

The Governor looked at Dicon. He saw more than a smile on Dicon's face. He saw that Dicon Lovering meant every word he had said.

He compromised: "Under the circumstances . . . perhaps we might permit . . . Yes, I think we may. I will either be present or some other responsible member of our community shall deputise for me. Our code of conduct, Mister Lovering, is rigid. You will appreciate I have gone as far as I dare to meet your request."

Then Dicon spoke the words which later he would rather have bitten off his tongue than utter.

"I think, Governor, such a code of rules is an insult to people of our quality. Possibly they are designed to prevent unfettered speech."

"How dare you, Mister Lovering, express so base a thought?" The Governor drew himself up, a model of outraged dignity.

Dicon drawled his answer. "Dear me, have I said something which I should not have done?"

"We will say no more, Mister Lovering." The Governor bowed to Elspeth, nodded to Marion, and motioned Dicon and Jeremy to the door.

In the Square, without a word, he turned, and left Dicon and Jeremy to their own devices.

"Jeremy," said Dicon, "I should have kept a tighter rein on my tongue. Jeremy, you may account me a very fool."

Jeremy laughed. " You mean, Uncle, that you should not have let the Governor know you doubted Cousin Elspeth's story? That he had told her what she might tell us."

" That's the way of it, Jeremy."

" Well, what are the odds, Uncle? Sooner or later you would have been bound to say it. It just happens to be sooner."

" Which gives us less time, Jeremy, to discover how he made our cousin deviate from the truth, and also makes it a deal harder. From now on, my lad, eyes will be upon us. Learn from my folly, lad. Keep your tongue under control!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE FRIENDLINESS OF WILLIAM

DICON LOVERING had cause to regret his unusual quickness of speech. For more than a week every effort on his part to see Elspeth alone was frustrated. He was not prevented from seeing her, yet it was always contrived that either the Governor or some member of the Council joined him. And it was done in such a manner, so politely, that he could not take offence.

And so it was with Jeremy and William.

Dicon was forced to realise that, day and night, he and his companions were watched.

William, however, did not take to it kindly. By taking a leaf from the Governor's book he found some consolation in the situation. Friendliness was the way of it.

Twice he had been just about to speak with Marion when, from apparently nowhere, either the Governor, or someone obviously appointed by him, joined them.

On the third occasion—it was a solemn-faced Councillor—William turned upon him with his face beaming with good will. "Bless my soul, 'tis good to have company, that it be. The more the merrier, says I! A pleasant chat: nothin' like it to pass away the dull hour. Right glad I am to see y', middear!" With the utmost

friendliness the mighty-muscled William of the amiable grin laid his hands affectionately upon the Councillor and shook him as he named him a proper chap. Then, William took his hands to shake them as a token of his friendship.

Though the Councillor's teeth rattled and his hands were all but crushed, such a friendliness did William express that he could take no offence.

William enjoyed himself.

He repeated, and continued to repeat, his exhibitions of good will, which was on any occasion he spoke with Marion. Governor, and Councillors, did not approach too closely, but that was after William had done what Dicon had done to the Governor. He gave a Councillor a friendly pat on the shoulder.

The Councillor collapsed. True, William picked him up, but the Councillor was not consoled.

The Governor mentioned to Dicon that William was just a little too demonstrative.

"It is his kindness of heart, Governor," Dicon observed. "A kindly man is William. He does not, however, know his own strength. He means to be gentle."

Then William decided to be really friendly. He went about with a joyous smile, and everyone he met he called a dear old friend and smacked him on the back to prove it. And his laughter echoed around the Square and the braver hearts who had

been smitten in friendship's name attempted a smile. They were not very successful.

To Dicon, William confided that he reckoned his victims would get tired of being friends before he did. But of that Dicon was not so sure. William could stand for so much frustration and no more.

Jeremy was openly furious.

"I am not going to stand this, Uncle," he said.

"Bide your time, lad," said Dicon. "You have seen what trouble I have made through being over hasty."

"I will try, Uncle, but 'tis none too easy."

Dicon wondered how long Jeremy would keep his temper. He might well get into some bother . . . and then, there was nothing more certain—if Jeremy were hurt, William Gammon would be well and truly set up! And if William were to cut loose there would be grave trouble.

Dicon was also puzzled and a little disconcerted by James Challoner. He and the Governor were always together. With some amusement Dicon observed Challoner's energetic training of the Perfect Peace armed force. Ungrudgingly, he gave Challoner praise. He was as competent as he was energetic.

But Challoner, with the Governor, frequently visited Elspeth Trevannion. He knew not why such knowledge should disturb him, but it did, and Dicon pondered deeply and found no reasonable answer.

Challoner spoke of Elspeth with respect and admiration. "You are to be congratulated upon the grace and charm of your kinswoman, Lovering," he had said. "The Governor has told me of her history. Truly extraordinary! And how fortunate for the Governor that his ideals are hers, and that she has placed her fortune at his disposal in their furtherance. A lady in a million, my dear Lovering."

"Agreed, Challoner. The Lady Elspeth is all you proclaim her. Her will in the matter of the future is mine. I have informed the Governor of that. The Loverings, with my recommendation, will support him."

Dicon trusted that Challoner would not notice the qualification governing his promise of support—if it were the Lady Elspeth's will. Before many more days had passed Dicon was given further reason for deep and disturbing deliberation.

Barebones came to him. "I have, Sir, to give you a message from the white woman who is companion to the young lady. She begs that I inform you to watch well the white man, Challoner. She states that he is a smooth-tongued rogue and a proper wrong 'un."

"Eh, what's that. How did you get that message?"

"The white woman dropped her basket. I reached it more quickly than the white man watching her. It was very simple."

"Um," said Dicon, as he stroked his chin, "um."

Then suddenly he said : " Barebones, bless my soul, you have been speaking English as well as I do myself."

Barebones gave one of his grave smiles. " Has your nephew not informed you of my ability to speak your tongue ? No, I had not thought he would."

Barebones then told Dicon his story.

" I thank you for your confidence. I am honoured and I know in my heart that much good will come from you. I find it, however, a little difficult to call you by your nickname in view of all you have told me. Barebones is a somewhat incongruous appellation for a man in your position."

The Indian again smiled. " It is not my name that is of importance, it is the thoughts that it brings to mind which matter."

" In that you are in no error," said Dicon. " Now tell me, what think you Marion Hunkin meant ? In what way is Challoner a rogue ? "

" That, Mister Lovering, I cannot answer. Yet if I may offer my own opinion, I have an impression that Mister Challoner is a man of many faces and he discloses but the one he wishes to be seen."

" And your reason, Barebones ? "

" I have no reason. Call it instinct. We who live in the wilds develop our instinct. We be-

come aware of many dangers before we see them, otherwise we should not survive. We tread carefully before we see the hidden snake that could strike us."

The reference to the hidden snake, Dicon felt, had a definite significance and was not lost upon him.

"Um," he said, "um. I do not like it, Barebones. I am a puzzled man. But this I ask you, for I trust you implicitly. My nephew is young and I fear somewhat impatient. Lately he has taken to carrying a rapier. I do not think, young as he is, that any man here could stand against him. That is why I fear for him. If he were provoked overmuch, and if he killed, even in fair fight, he would never forgive himself, and grief is not good for one so young."

"It is understood, Mister Lovering. I do not think you have cause to fear. Your nephew would only fight if there were no other course open to him. I have a great affection for your nephew."

"Thank you, Barebones, thank you indeed."

"My people will be here, within the next day or so," said Barebones, quick to change the subject. "They come to trade."

"So I gather," replied Dicon, "and I know something of what they may expect. However, the demands of the settlers here should not trouble your people. I do not intend that it should."

Barebones asked him how that could be.

"Because," answered Dicon, "I will pay whatever sum the settlers ask of your people. It matters not how much. Price is of little importance."

"But consider, Mister Lovering, you will be asked to pay ten times the value of the corn. It would not be right for you to sacrifice so much money."

"Sacrifice money? Never think of it, Barebones. There will come a time when the folk of Perfect Peace must trade, or cease to exist, with my people. I am content to wait and, as a man of commerce, let me assure you, I shall require some recompense for the outlay of ready money." Dicon chuckled amicably. "He who calls the tune must pay the piper."

"The friendship of my people will be yours, Mister Lovering. Believe me, they are folk who do not forget kindness . . . or injury."

Dicon laughed and then, on impulse, stretched out his hand.

Barebones took it. "You are, I now know, my white brother."

And Barebones meant what he said.

"And that," answered Dicon, "is the way it should be . . . Brother."

CHAPTER XV

THE FRUITS OF FRIENDLINESS

FROM outdoors came the sound of the sharp words of command from James Challoner and the tread of the feet of those who obeyed them. Dicon, seated on one edge of the table in the guest house living-room, looked at Jeremy and then at William. He had been telling them of Marion's message and Barebone's declaration to the effect that Challoner was a man of many faces.

"Well," said Dicon, "may I have your valued opinions?"

William grunted: "If he be up to any tricks, better way I get me hands on 'un and squeeze the truth out of 'un."

"Um," said Dicon, "a pleasant thought, William, yet I fear we must resort to more subtle methods for the time being. And you, Jeremy, my lad, what say you?"

"'Tis plain, Uncle, we are not trusted by the Governor and, therefore, we may conclude he has something hidden from us. I do not like Mister Challoner, nor do I trust him. But what course we should steer I do not know."

Having thought a little, Dicon said: "It would seem the situation is this. We are under suspicion and watched by day and night. We are prevented, in a friendly manner, from holding any conversation

in private with Elspeth or Marion Hunkin. From which we may infer free speech could well be the knife which cuts the bag and lets the cat loose. We are amongst hostile friends with only one ally: Barebones."

"Aye, Barebones," said William, "is a proper chap. Pity he wasn't born in Barnstaple . . . a proper chap." Thus William bestowed the highest praise of which he was able upon the Indian.

"It now remains," said Dicon, "to draw up a plan of campaign. Our first objective is to discover what Elspeth or Marion would tell us were they able. Pray think upon the problem. I shall welcome your suggestions."

William put on his innocent act; a certain sign of anything but innocence.

"Aye, 'tis a problem, Mister Dicon. When the likes of a gentleman like you can't see the way out, reckon there b'ain't much as y' can expect from the likes of me. But I'm proper friendly, that I be, proper friendly. Now, Master Dicon, b'ain't often as I makes a wager but for once—come now, what d'ye say to a little wager? A crown? What d'ye say?"

"I say, William, that when you wager a crown you invariably win."

"Aye, Mister Dicon, when I wagers I wins. B'ain't no sense wagerin' to lose."

"Come on, William, out with it. What is in your mind?"

“Friendly, that’s me, Mister Dicon. I ain’t even started yet. Reckons as there be ways and means of havin’ a chat . . . friendly like.”

William grinned all over his face and Dicon knew that not one more word would he get out of him. Dicon turned to Jeremy and shook his head : “No good, Jeremy, William is the grandson of an oyster.”

William Gammon had ever been a man who put faith in success. The demonstrations of hearty friendship towards all who stood by to overhear his conversation with Marion had been—at least from his point of view—completely successful. He proposed to continue them with even greater enthusiasm. He waited his time.

Marion Hunkin walked across the Square with her basket.

William made towards her. So did a member of the Council. A lean, dismal man he was. William, as he walked, considered him a most suitable subject for unrestrained friendly greeting. William and the dismal one reached Marion at the same moment and both wished her a good-day. William right joyfully, the dismal one—dismally.

“Good-day to you, Marion,” boomed William. “A proper day, a lovely day. Now bless me heart, if it ain’t one o’ me dear friends of this trim little New England town, Perfect Peace. So full o’ the milk of human kindness ’tis fair astonishin’

that it be. So I bids y' good-day, me dear friend ! ”

William smacked the dismal citizen a hearty smack, a lusty smack, upon the shoulder : that time-honoured indication of good companionship. And it had a most disastrous effect. Such was the weight of the tap of friendship that the dismal citizen was pushed completely off balance and sent against the stout timber of the stockade. He went down in a heap—senseless.

William knelt beside him. So did Marion. “ He’s senseless,” said William. “ Can’t hear a word. Quick, afore he comes round.”

“ That there Challoner wants to marry Miss Elspeth. The Governor’s all for him. And Miss Elspeth’s said as the Governor can have her jewels, leastways she reckons if she said she wouldn’t give ’em, Mister Dicon, Master Jeremy and you wouldn’t be leaving Perfect Peace . . . threats, William . . . see.”

“ Aye, I sees,” said William. “ Tell Miss Elspeth to tell Challoner as he’s got to get Mister Dicon’s consent afore she can marry him. Mister Dicon’s her kinsman, see ? That’s only right and proper.”

“ Aye, William, that I will. Shush ! No more.”

The sound of running feet put a stop to their talk. Along came the men of the gun team with James Challoner.

“ What has happened ? ” asked James Challoner

sharply. William straightened up. "Ah, so it be you, Mister Challoner, Sir. Proper weak lot around here. I just patted him on the shoulder friendly like and he goes rolling up against the stockade and knocks himself clean stupid. But he's well enough. Be round, and as good as new, in a minute."

"Gammon, you must take more care! These excessive demonstrations of good will are, to say the least, annoying. They must cease; do you understand?"

James Challoner could have had no idea how very close to disaster he was standing. William resisted the temptation to show him just how hard he could hit when the situation warranted solid buffeting. Indeed, with a semi-apologetic smile and a face as guileless as a newly-born babe's, he said: "Mister Challoner, now what be you a saying to poor William Gammon who be as lovin' and kind as a cooin' dove? Just friendly I was, just a little tap for to show him 'ow I liked him well. Just a little tap, no harder than that. . . ."

And William tapped James Challoner—a gentle love-tap.

With a look of blank amazement on his jolly face William watched James Challoner rise from the ground.

"Well, now would y' believe it?" he cried. "Now fancy y' a proper fire-breathin' fightin'

man as teaches folk how to work artillery pieces, slipping over like that there ! Be y' sure y' ain't gettin' weak, Mister Challoner ? Maybe y'r vittuals ain't to your likin' ? Well, well, well, and dearie me ! ”

Marion said : “ William, don't gabble so much. The poor gentleman is coming round.”

“ Ah,” said William, “ so he is. Maybe I'd better leave it to Mister Challoner to help him up. I'll be gettin' back now. Got to see Mister Dicon now I come to think on it. Good-day, each.”

William made his way across the Square with a sailor's true rolling gait whilst Marion Hunkin stifled a wild desire to shout : “ Well done, William.”

The gun team stared at the back of William's mighty form, and Marion, as she rose to her feet and left the victim of William's friendship to James Challoner's care, said : “ Well now, whatever would happen to a man he meant to hurt ? ” —which was just what the gun team was wondering.

William returned to the guest house. Dicon and Jeremy were playing chess and from the look on Dicon's face Jeremy was master of the situation. Dicon looked up. William's face was still all innocence, and Dicon therefore said : “ You are dying to tell us, William. We can see you have succeeded while we have remained idle.”

"Oh, 'tis nothing much, Mister Dicon," said William airily. "'Course I shouldn't be surprised if you wasn't asked a question or so, more in the way of y'r blessing, in the next day or so: you bein' Miss Elspeth's kinsman, that being only right and proper." •

"William Gammon, will you be good enough to speak up like a man. Come to the point!"

"Ah, that's it, Mister Dicon. Well, 'tis this way. That there Mister Challoner wants to wed Miss Elspeth, and I reckoned—so I mentioned it to Marion—as how he should, by rights, ask your consent and y'r blessing."

Dicon jumped up, sweeping the chessmen, board and all, clattering to the floor. "What!" he shouted.

"There y' are, Master Jeremy! That's your uncle for you. Tells us to go easy . . . take things gentle like. Now, Mister Dicon, I'll tell y' all about it, so do 'ee sit down nice and quiet like."

William told his story, chuckling at the success of his methods of the disposing of eavesdroppers.

"By Heaven," cried Dicon, "let him come! Let him come, the impertinent Jack-a-napes!"

"Nay, Mister Dicon," chided William, "don't 'ee be too hard on the poor gentleman. I gave him a little tap too. Proper weak he is! Went down like a ninepin, so don't 'ee be too hard on poor Mister Challoner."

“ You tapped him too, William ? Oh, splendid. Oh, why was I not there ? ” laughed Jeremy.

Dicon recovered his temper. He smiled, albeit a little grimly. “ Friend Challoner is seeking more than a little tap,” he said.

“ Everything comes to him who waits,” said William, “ ’cept me. Fate be proper unkind to me, that it be. No fortune comes poor William’s way. Proper disheartening I calls it. Disheartening ! ”

“ Now what troubles have you, William ? Out with it. We can bear it,” said Dicon.

“ ’Tis more than I can, Mister Dicon. I was a thinkin’ of that crown I wanted you to wager. I could have done with that there crown. Proper disheartening I calls it.”

CHAPTER XVI

CHALLONER LEARNS A LESSON

DICON laid down the quill and read aloud all that he had written. "Well? What do you think of it, eh? A masterly effort in my opinion!"

William Gammon said it sounded proper, Jeremy agreed with him, and Barebones said: "My people will come to know that there are indeed white men who are prepared to give material evidence that they have the welfare of the red man at heart."

"'Tis a matter of commerce," said Dicon, "I do but lend for a little while."

Barebones merely smiled.

"There is no need for me to tell you—the contents of this letter are between ourselves," said Dicon as he folded, sealed and addressed it. "Well, that is done. I will now hand it to the Governor for despatch to Robert Hamilton. The rider leaves before noon. Your people should be here by the morrow, should they not, Barebones?"

"They are overdue," answered Barebones, "but their fires are no more than one day's travel from this settlement. Perhaps they will be here, as you expect, tomorrow."

Dicon rose from his chair, tucked the letter into his coat and announced his intention of seeking the Governor.

The Governor was in conference with James Challoner when Dicon reached him. On the table were rough maps of the surrounding district.

"Ah, my dear Mister Lovering, you find us immersed in a study of war-like stratagems, tactics and military arts of which, I fear, I am little acquainted. However, our good Commander of Armed Forces is most alarmingly proficient, so I am well content to leave the details and policies of defence in his very capable hands."

James Challoner stroked his beard and looked suitably gratified.

"Like you, Governor, I am no master of military arts but, should danger threaten, such is my confidence in my good friend that I shall have no fear," said Dicon cheerfully.

James Challoner failed to detect any hint of sarcasm in Dicon's tones or any look of mockery on his face.

Dicon continued: "I have a letter here, Governor. It concerns the small matter of business we discussed. May I entrust it to you for despatch? I understand your rider leaves before noon for Boston."

"Delighted, Mister Lovering, and I rejoice that progress is being made so rapidly towards our mutual and ultimate goal."

As Dicon handed the letter into the Governor's keeping, the Governor said: "Ah, um . . . There is a . . . er a matter, Mister Lovering, which

affects us. I may say joyously—upon which I should like, and I include our friend Challoner, to . . . er . . . consult you. I suggest this afternoon, if you can find the time convenient.”

“Most certainly, my dear Governor, my time is at your disposal. •I am all agog to hear your words. Yet I will hold myself in patience until the right and proper time!”

Dicon bowed and departed.

“Well,” said Dicon to Jeremy, William and Barebones, “we may take it that dear Challoner has again visited my kinswoman and has been advised by her to ask my consent and blessing.” Dicon sighed. “I have reconsidered my opinion of Challoner’s intelligence. It is much lower than I had believed. In fact, he is a very stupid man. He comes with the Governor this afternoon.”

“I will make it a point to be absent,” said Barebones.

“On the contrary,” said Dicon, “I would have you here, by your leave. We are allied together—the four of us.”

“As you will,” said Barebones somewhat reluctantly.

“Uncle, do you not think it . . . I mean, ’twill be very embarrassing for Mister Challoner if we are all here.”

William looked at Dicon and what he saw in Dicon’s face brought a rumbling chuckle from him and the words: “Embarrassing, course ’twill

be, Master Jeremy. Now if y' wants to wager a crown . . ."

Jeremy said he did not.

*

*

*

The Governor and James Challoner arrived at the guest house. The time was precisely three of the clock. The Governor smiled benignly and James Challoner was his most suave and ceremonious self.

"The business, my dear Mister Lovering, and I am sure your nephew, Gammon and your Indian guide will appreciate the . . . er . . . situation . . . is of a somewhat private and confidential nature," said the Governor gently.

"Oh, bless your heart, Governor," said Dicon, "there is nothing in my life that I hold private from my nephew Jeremy, my good friend William or my brother Tallwahma."

The Governor raised his eyebrows: "Did I hear you name your guide, 'brother', Mister Lovering?"

"You did, Governor," said Dicon. "My brother Barebones, to use his nickname, is not all that appears to the eye, but that is of no matter; he would still be my brother were he not. Nay, you have naught to fear. Your confidence will not be betrayed. Be seated I beg you, and then to business."

The Governor was suddenly at a loss for words but managed to say: "Very . . . er . . . most

... er ... embarrassing ... for our friend Challoner. Er ... an affair of the heart ... "

"Heart say you, Governor?" Dicon feigned astonishment. "Do not tell me Challoner has plighted his troth to some belle of Perfect Peace and wishes me to act as groomsman for him? Oh, Challoner, you have kept your secret mighty dark. I wish you all joy of the event."

"My dear Lovering," began James Challoner, "I fear you jump to wrongful conclusions."

"Eh," cried Dicon. "Wrong, am I? Then how else can an affair of the heart be taken?"

"My dear Lovering, I am no man to dilly or dally. The truth is, I come to you, as kinsman of the Lady Elspeth Trevannion, and I ask your consent and blessing upon our marriage. I come at the Lady Elspeth's request."

"I stand aghast," cried Dicon, "I am dumb-founded! Words fail me and I do not believe my ears."

"Nevertheless, my dear Lovering, your ears have heard aright. I beg you, what say you?"

"That I must have time to think," said Dicon, "since it appears you are serious. You have placed a grave responsibility upon my shoulders."

"Come, my dear Lovering, say me yea, for the lover is ever impatient. You have naught against me?"

"Um," said Dicon, "neither have I aught in your favour."

"I beg your pardon, Lovering. You know I am James Challoner of Blackshaw in the County of Staffordshire—a gentleman of ancient family and ample possessions. You can have naught against me."

"I know that you *say* you are James Challoner, and that you claim to have ample possessions, but I have only your word for that. While I accepted your word as guarantee for the loan of a certain small advance of money, I would not entrust the life of my kinswoman to you merely on your word alone."

All eyes were on James Challoner . . . his face whitened and his eyes gleamed.

"I do not care to have my word doubted, Lovering."

"Challoner, you are not the only person in this world who owns to that dislike. But I know nothing of you, and until I know more, you had better let your request remain."

"By thunder, no man shall call me a liar!"

Dicon was smiling; a bantering smile. "Attend me, Challoner. You say you love my kinswoman. Very well, put yourself in my place as her nearest kinsman. Supposing someone unknown to you asked for her hand, would you not be careful?"

"To be sure, but I have told you who I am, and what I am. What need for more is there?"

"Then, if you will not be satisfied with what

I have said, hear the rest. You were found adrift in a boat and rescued. And you told us a story which we then believed, but has it not struck you that, in some part, your story has certain peculiarities ?

“ It is very strange that you managed to escape from a stricken ship, attacked by pirates, in a small boat when the moon was full and night as light as day. Is it not strange you escaped unobserved ? Then again, you decided to grow a beard. Beards assist disguise. And killing a man for no apparent reason, before he could speak, would certainly prevent the . . . er . . . disclosure of anything . . . er . . . undesirable. I am not making any accusations, Challoner, I am merely considering possibilities.”

James Challoner, livid with rage, leaned over the table and struck Dicon, open handed, on the cheek.

“ As I expected, Challoner, you wish to force a duel upon me. Out of the way, my consent would not be required. So be it, we fight, and swords it shall be ! ”

The Governor made no effort to placate James Challoner nor did he attempt the role of peace-maker.

“ Alas,” he said, “ the duel is customary in these matters. I am powerless.”

“ We settle our differences . . . when ? ” demanded James Challoner.

"When you wish," said Dicon lazily. "Now, or say within an hour? The Square is level and suitable."

"Agreed," snapped Challoner. "No seconds and . . . to the death."

"I always did say it was a waste o' time," said William thoughtfully, "picking posies; it allus was and allus will be."

"What do you mean, William," asked Jeremy.

"Waste o' time, that's what," said William. "I picks 'em to put on his grave and poor Mister Challoner wouldn't be able to smell 'em. Waste o' time!"

James Challoner bowed stiffly and strode haughtily outside. The Governor shrugged his shoulders, muttered something inaudible, then followed him.

William laughed, whilst Barebones looked anxious. Jeremy examined Dicon's rapier before handing it to him.

"Better way put him out of his misery, Mister Dicon," said William. "I'll tell 'ee he means to end 'ee, leastways if he could, which he can't. Don't 'ee look so serious, Barebones, me old ship-mate. If Mister Dicon has a mind to send that there Challoner down to Old Nick, that's the way of it."

Never had the Square been so crowded. How the news of the duel had sped so quickly, or how the folk could have gathered in so short a space

of time—and left their labours—baffled comprehension. But there were no women spectators.

Jeremy saw the gathering and said, as Dicon, William and Barebones left the guest house, “I will follow later.”

William had his cutlash at his side. In his right hand he carried Dicon’s naked rapier.

James Challoner awaited their coming. On seeing Dicon he removed his coat and passed it to the Governor.

Dicon wore no coat. He drawled to the Governor: “I am at your service.”

William passed the rapier to him. William was grinning widely.

The crowd was hushed. The folk of Perfect Peace had come to see the Master of Artillery, the Commander of their Armed Force, make short work of the mild-mannered visitor to their settlement. No other result was possible. Maybe some felt a pang of pity for the young man by whose side they felt that death was waiting.

“Governor,” said Dicon, “I take it you will give the word ‘engage’?”

“When you are ready, gentlemen,” said the Governor. He looked at Dicon, he looked at James Challoner. He gave the word:

“Engage.”

Challoner attacked impetuously; eager and confident. Dicon appeared merely indifferent.

Challoner’s steel flickered all round him—and he

was not harmed. The onlookers, unappreciative of the finer points of true swordsmanship, marvelled at Dicon's luck ; it could be naught but luck that enabled him to ward off such lightning thrusts.

William Gammon was enjoying himself. He looked round for Jeremy with whom to share the joke, but Jeremy was not to be seen. William returned his attention to the fight.

Dicon was smiling, a lazy, insolent smile. Whether the spectators were first to realise that Dicon was simply playing with Challoner, or whether it was Challoner himself, cannot be rightly said.

From the crowd came a murmur of sheer wonderment, and Challoner made a despairing attack. His attack was brushed aside with contempt.

Then Dicon attacked. He drove Challoner before him and played with him as a cat plays with a mouse.

Dicon called : " Catch, William."

His steel played round Challoner's sword-arm and there came a sudden flick . . . high in the air James Challoner's blade described a shining arc.

William caught it neatly by the hilt.

Challoner stood, disarmed : and Dicon advanced upon him. A long-drawn cry rose from the crowd.

With sweat beads on his face James Challoner stood and waited for the lunge that would end him. Dicon's rapier flashed forward . . . between

belt and breeches. He stepped back as the belt parted and Challoner's hands went to hold up his breeches.

Then Dicon spoke, coldly: "Challoner, your swordsmanship may be well enough for tavern brawling, but let me advise you, obtain some tuition before you test your skill against any man who has even the most elementary knowledge of sword play. Come, William, and you, my brother Tallwahma—there is little profit to be gained here."

William balanced Challoner's rapier in practised hand and said: "Pity! 'Tis a pretty weapon, sure enough." Then he put it across his knee and snapped it like a rotten stick.

Throwing the pieces at James Challoner's feet, he said: "There you be, Mister Challoner. Better way I broke it. Dangerous things swords . . . specially if you ain't used to 'em. Might cut y'r fingers."

With a wink at Barebones, he took the Indian's arm and said: "Come on, middear."

And the spectators, including the Governor, watched in silence. And so did James Challoner . . . still holding up his breeches!

*

*

*

Within the guest house, William said: "Why didn't 'ee finish him, Mister Dicon? The rogue was out t' finish y'."

"Brother," said Barebones, "I am a proud

man. Ah, I saw swordsmanship! But alas, I was guilty of a great, but sinful joy, to see the gleam of steel again. The old Adam remains strong in us all."

William grinned. "So 'twas in Saint Michael when 'e drove Lucifer out o' Heaven, so don't 'ee worrit about a little bit of sword play. Reckon you could handle one o' they tommyhawks, or whatever y' call 'em, if need be."

"There was a time . . ." began Barebones, but he closed his lips on what else he might have said.

Dicon looked around. "Eh, what's happened to young Jeremy?"

"Haven't seen him, Mister Dicon," said William. "Ah, but 'ere 'e comes."

It was not Jeremy who entered. It was James Challoner followed by the Governor.

"Lovering, I have come . . . to ask your pardon . . ." began James Challoner. "I have been a fool and worse. I can only attempt to excuse my conduct by saying that a man in love . . . Will you let bygones be bygones? Let us . . . forget?"

"Challoner," said Dicon gently, "I agree with you. You are a fool. First a fool because you believed you could kill me, and secondly a fool because you underestimate the intelligence of others."

James Challoner bowed his head. "I . . . did . . . not think."

"I did," Dicon interposed. "Now, I am inclined to put this ridiculous business behind us, but on no account will I hear any more of your wedding my kinswoman, unless you give me proofs of your claim to be all you state and, above all, that my kinswoman wishes to take you to be her husband."

"I can only say, thank you, Lovering. Words are but poor things to express all I feel. I will—and I now fully appreciate your reasoning—obtain the proofs you so rightly demand. My future happiness depends upon them."

The Governor sighed deeply and cried loudly : "All is well. Sweet reason has triumphed."

"Hullo, Uncle."

Jeremy was standing in the doorway. He looked somewhat surprised at seeing James Challoner. "Now, Mister Jeremy," explained William gently, "you knows what you does when y' catches a little trout in the river : a little 'un what's too small to eat."

"Throw it back again so that it will grow to be worth catching, William ? But what has that got to do with what has been happening ? "

"Everything, Master Jeremy. Fishin' is the same as duels. You lets 'em live to fight another day . . . when they're able to give y' some sport."

"Where have you been, Jeremy ? " Dicon broke in.

William choked, Dicon stared and Barebones

covered his mouth with his hand as Jeremy answered in a piteous voice :

“ I hid away. I dared not watch a dreadful thing like a duel in case my dear uncle should come to harm. I could not bear to see him hurt.”

Not until the Governor and James Challoner had departed did Dicon say : “ Jeremy, what games have you been up to ? ”

“ It seemed to me, Uncle, that as all eyes were upon you and Mister Challoner, I might make a little hay while the sun shone, especially as I could only envisage one result of your . . . er . . . argument.”

“ Well, come on, lad, out with it.”

“ I decided that I might, with profit, call upon Cousin Elspeth without fear of our conversation being rudely interrupted. Incidentally, Uncle, your one qualification concerning Mister Challoner’s proposal to wed Cousin Elspeth has ruined his hopes. She can’t stand the sight of him. She told me so herself.”

“ You young rip,” said Dicon, laughing, “ you are not such a numbskull as you might be. Whence comes this sudden intelligence ? ”

“ Doubtless, Uncle,” replied Jeremy, “ my mind has become more alert since it has been relieved from the continual study of the Science of Navigation ! ”

CHAPTER XVII

AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSAL

THE sun was shining on the morning when the Indians came to Perfect Peace. There were six of them. Seketwath, Chief of the Cummaquid Tribe of Massachusetts, and five warriors.

They made a brave showing as they rode, bare-back, into the Square, their feathered head-dresses fluttering proudly in time with the mincing steps or fractious curvetting of their spirited mounts.

Jeremy missed nothing of their bearing or finery. He noted the ease and skill in the control of their mounts, and the ripple of muscles in arms and back—they were naked to the waist—earned his admiration.

He guessed, and rightly, that the red and yellow markings painted on chest and face were peculiar to their tribe. Their trousers, made from the hide of deer, decorated with designs worked in coloured beads, were as ornate as their shoes, which Jeremy was later to know were named moccasins.

Jeremy nudged his uncle. "Uncle, you see . . . they carry no weapons."

"They come in peace," said Dicon.

Then Barebones came into the Square.

For the first time Dicon and Jeremy saw him dressed as an Indian. Naked to the waist and

wearing hide trousers, he stood up straightly. His head-dress was but a single black feather—and around his neck he wore a plain cord upon which hung a simple wooden crucifix.

He raised his hand and cried aloud: "Seketwath."

The answer came from the Chief. "Tall-wahma."

Then they spoke together in their own language. Dicon heard his name mentioned, and the Chief and his warriors looked in his direction.

Then came the Governor, the Council and James Challoner, and Seketwath rode to meet them.

Barebones said to Dicon: "Seketwath is my brother, a year younger than I. He is a good Chief, loved and respected."

"Your younger brother, Seketwath? Yet he is your tribal chief?"

"Yes, my younger brother. Chieftainship was not for me. I must tread another road."

"'Tis understood, Brother," said Dicon quietly.

Barebones inclined his head and asked: "As my people are here, merely to pay respects, and will return to their camp some five miles away almost at once, are you in need of my services this day? If not I would be grateful for your permission to spend a few hours with my brother, Seketwath."

"There is no need to ask. Do as you will.

And there is no need for me to tell you to take which horse you wish."

Within the hour the Indians departed. Seketwath, the Chief, raised his arm in salute to Dicon as he passed by. Barebones, as did the five warriors, kept his eyes to the front, looking neither to left nor right.

"I like Barebones, Uncle Dicon," said Jeremy.

"And so do I, my lad. Would that there were more of his kind in this world of ours."

Barebones returned before sunset and Jeremy went to his tepee beside the guest house. Jeremy wanted to know more about Indians and their ways, and Barebones patiently answered questions, one after the other, until Dicon came to his rescue.

"Now if Jeremy would show the same insatiable thirst for a knowledge of navigation," said Dicon, "we might make a seaman of him!"

Barebones did not comment on that remark, but said: "My brother Seketwath begs me say that you and yours shall never stand in need of a friend while he, or any Cummaquid Indian, remains living." Dicon expressed polite surprise.

"I have told my brother of the letter you sent to Boston," said Barebones. "My people are as quick to recognise the act of a friend as they are that of an enemy. You have offered friendship and help in their time of need. They will not forget: nor should they do so."

"'Tis little I have offered, Barebones; little

enough to win friendship. Pray tell your Chief when next you see him, that a Lovering also does not forget the hand offered in friendship. Good-night, Brother."

"Good-night, Brother ; God's blessing be upon you."

Dicon and Jeremy returned quietly to the guest house.

*

*

*

The days passed and the Cummaquid Indians made no further visits to the settlement.

But James Challoner visited the Indian encampment daily. He was quite frank about his excursions and made no secret of his reasons for visiting them.

He said : " I will not deny I have an ulterior motive. I visit the Indians and I keep my eyes open and I pick up scraps of information which, should we ever be attacked, would stand us all in good stead. But I do not envisage any hostility from the Indians. I find them friendly and most hospitable."

Barebones told Jeremy his people were settling down in the camp they had made and that when the right time came there would be feasting and entertainment before the opening up of trade talks with the white folk.

Dicon, however, became uneasy, although there was no foundation for uneasiness. Not by sign

or word did the Governor, or any member of the Council, show the distrust of Dicon and his companions that he felt they had.

"I have no reason for believing they distrust us, or that by their attitude they are less well-disposed towards us. And yet . . . I believe they are. They've got something new they hold against us, but I know not what it is or why."

"Reckon you be mistaken, Mister Dicon," said William. "Likely y' be imaginin' it. T'aint as if they was cheerful, hail-fellow-well-met. Come to think on it, y' never see anybody laugh in this place. Anyways, if they don't like us over much, t'ain't no reason for us to worrit."

Jeremy thought much the same way as William, but Barebones would not commit himself either way, and Dicon formed the opinion, rightly or wrongly, that the Indian felt as he did.

Daily, William made it his business to meet Marion, carry her basket and converse with her, and always a third person arrived upon the scene and joined them. But the third person kept well out of reach of William's friendly shoulder pats!

It was the Governor who, as William put it later on, "set Mister Dicon up proper".

James Challoner was visiting the Indian encampment and the Governor came to the guest house. Dicon was explaining a point of navigation which had eluded Jeremy's understanding, and Barebones was attempting to give some account to

William of the significance of Indian tribal customs when the Governor called.

He apologised for interrupting their leisure and then took the chair which Jeremy hastened to place for him.

The Governor 'hummed and hahed', smiled and gradually came to the matter he had in mind. He was, he said, an emissary. He was assured of Mister James Challoner's integrity, he praised his sterling qualities, and he begged Dicon to give his consent to Challoner's marriage with his kinswoman, the Lady Elspeth Trevannion. He spoke eloquently enough, and advanced a very spate of reasons why two young people should be made happy.

"I am convinced, my dear Mister Lovering," said the Governor ingratiatingly, "that you have the welfare of your kinswoman at heart. Let her take her happiness while she may."

Dicon listened, and William, who knew his every mood, caught Jeremy's eye and jerked his thumb in Dicon's direction.

Jeremy grinned. The storm was about to burst.

"I think," said Dicon, "it is high time we cleared the air. William, will you, please, present my respects to Lady Elspeth and ask her if she will honour us with her presence. If you will be good enough, tell her we should esteem her dictum upon a matter affecting her future. Should anyone wish to prevent your errand, William, pray

tell them you have the Governor's full permission to visit Lady Elspeth, and if that does not suffice . . . you understand, William ? ”

William, without a word, slung his cutlash to his belt and cried : “ Mister Dicon, right joyfully. Aye, aye, Sir.”

“ Stay, I will accompany you,” cried the Governor, “ it will be safer.”

“ Not for William,” said Dicon.

Within minutes, Elspeth, Marion Hunkin, with William and the Governor returned to the guest house.

Dicon made his most elegant bow, proclaimed himself his kinswoman's humble and devoted servant, and Jeremy did the same.

“ I will not waste your time, Cousin,” began Dicon. “ First, I will state that I have no proof of James Challoner's claim either to his name or condition. Until I have there could never be any thought of your wedding him.

“ Secondly, a few days ago James Challoner forced a duel upon me with, I think, the sole intention of ending me and so disposing of any need for my permission to wed you. That he did not succeed is beside the point. I should be indeed half-witted if I did not see your purpose, Governor. For some reason the proposed wedding must needs be expedited. But that cannot be.

“ Then there is a third consideration. I have yet to hear from my kinswoman's lips that she

wishes to wed James Challoner. We need no longer be in doubt. Cousin, pray give your answer. Do you wish to wed James Challoner ? ”

The answer came, swift, short, and final :
“ No ! ”

“ That,” said Dicon happily, “ settles everything. But hear me further. I have in mind one who will make an ideal husband for my cousin and to whom my consent will be gladly bestowed.”

“ Cousin Dicon, I beg of you ! When I wed it will be to the man of my choice,” said Elspeth hurriedly.

“ Assuredly, Cousin,” said Dicon, smiling. “ He is a man I can recommend to your favourable notice. A man, Cousin, who is a very model of every manly virtue and whose every care and thought would be for your welfare.”

“ You amaze me, Cousin Dicon ! May I ask the name of this paragon ? ” said Elspeth lightly.

“ To be sure,” said Dicon, “ myself ! ”

The explosion of a powder magazine could have been little less startling.

William gave one roar as he smacked his thigh :
“ Proper ! ”

Marion Hunkin gasped and exclaimed : “ Glory be ! ”

Jeremy’s eyes nearly popped out of his head and the Governor had no words at all.

Elspeth flushed, bit her lips, smiled, and her eyes shone. Dicon, quite unperturbed and com-

plete master of the situation, continued : " So, Cousin, I ask you plainly, will you wed me ? I will promise not to beat you more than twice a week."

" Dicon Lovering, under those circumstances, I will wed you."

Dicon took Elspeth's hand and raised it to his lips. He turned to the Governor.

" Now, we will settle one more matter here and now. From now on I shall see and speak with my future wife unhindered. The proprieties will be observed. Marion Hunkin will act as chaperon. That must be understood. Furthermore, anyone attempting interference does so at his peril."

" I will say no more," said the Governor. He bowed stiffly and walked away. His face was white and drawn with a fury he strove to control.

" Well," said Jeremy, " I for one object to your betrothal, Cousin Elspeth, on the grounds that my position becomes too intricate. I shall forbid the banns."

" Your position, eh ? " said Dicon. " Get back to your studies, my lad. The Science of Navigation, when fully comprehended, determines one's position."

" The Science of Navigation is useless in my quandary, Uncle Dicon. Elspeth is now cousin to me ; when she weds, she will be both cousin and aunt : a relationship which Euclid would describe—as he does one of his theorems—as absurd ! "

Jeremy dodged the "Manual of the Science of Navigation" which Dicon flung at him. Dicon turned to Elspeth. "Cousin, will you walk with me in the Square?"

"Delighted, Cousin."

So arm-in-arm they walked around the Square with Marion following behind at a discreet distance.

And no one said them nay.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHALLONER SHOWS HIS HAND

MISTER JAMES CHALLONER changed his quarters. He left the guest house for the Governor's house—at the Governor's invitation. It was, possibly, the only thing he could do under the circumstances. To have remained beneath the roof of the guest house would have been decidedly embarrassing. But he did not leave with the best of grace.

He said no word to Dicon. Perhaps his forbearance to voice his feelings in the best tradition of unsuccessful suitors was understandable. Dicon might not hold his hand if a second quarrel was forced upon him.

But James Challoner did not hold his tongue in check with William or Barebones. Jeremy he ignored, much to Jeremy's amusement.

It was the movement of his baggage to the Governor's house that gave him an excuse to vent his anger. William had no suggestion to make when James Challoner raised the question of how the baggage should be moved. James Challoner made it quite obvious that he expected either William or Barebones would do so. William at once became most aggravatingly deaf and continued his conversation with Barebones.

"Lovering's servants," sneered Challoner,

"have little conception of what is rightly due to gentlemen of quality."

William's hearing suddenly and miraculously returned to him.

"Did you say gentlemen, Mister Challoner, Sir? Mister Dicon ain't here, Master Jeremy ain't here, and that leaves only two common folk. Our brother, Barebones, being by rights Chief of his tribe ain't in this, so where's this gentleman you be talkin' about?"

"You . . ." snapped James Challoner, and his hand dropped to the hilt of his rapier. He hesitated, snarled and removed his hand from the weapon.

William smiled his broadest. "Now don't 'ee let a little thing like bein', or thinkin' you be, a gentleman spoil y'r sport. At y'r service be poor William, Mister Challoner, Sir. If so be y' wants carvin' up, then I'll get me old cutlash. But if y' don't want no mess, then what d'ye say to a fall or so at the wrestlin'? Break y'r back, Mister Challoner, Sir; or y'r neck if you like that better, as neat as could be. Then again, how d'ye fancy being slung clean through the window? Just say the word, Mister Challoner, Sir. Proper friendly be poor William: always ready to oblige. What? Y' don't want me services. Cruel disappointed, I be!"

James Challoner stamped out of the room.

"Disappointment, Brother Barebones, be my lot. I goes to wager a crown, just when I know I

can't lose . . . and nobody 'll wager. I offers to break a back, a neck, or chuck a fellow, what's fair askin' for it, clean through the window, and then 'e changes his mind. Don't want me services after all. Born to disappointment, I was."

Barebones looked at William and then did what no one would have believed possible. He put his head back, held his sides and laughed without restraint, and did not recover his gravity until shortage of breath put an end to his merriment. Then he gasped and wiped the tears from his eyes. Whereupon William cheered up and said : " Well, I reckon I've done something as nobody else could 'a' done."

The day following James Challoner's change of quarters, two braves of the Cummaquid Indians bore a message from the Chief to the Governor : an invitation to feast in their encampment. The invitation included the whole population of the settlement but, from custom, the Chief must have been aware that the law of Perfect Peace ruled out any possibility of the womenfolk taking part in the festivity.

Barebones explained that his people invariably gave a feast as a prelude to trading : a token of good will.

Accordingly, the male population of Perfect Peace made the five-mile journey to the Indian encampment on horseback, by cart and, a few, on foot.

Seketwath, the Chief, made a speech of welcome in broken English and the feast began. Seated on the ground around numerous fires, each citizen of Perfect Peace flanked by Indian braves and waited upon by Indian women, gave a convincing exhibition of appreciation and enjoyment.

As the feast consisted of enormous helpings of buffalo and deer flesh, practically raw, and, being cut from freshly slaughtered animals, consequently as tough as leather, their pretence of enjoyment was in every way eminently praiseworthy.

Then pipes were lit and passed round for ceremonial puffing. To have refused would have been the equivalent of a declaration of war. The sharing of a pipe was the sure symbol, according to Indian custom, of friendship. Jeremy, eager to do the right thing and to do it properly, took a deep draw and regretted his temerity. The tobacco was strong and Jeremy unused to smoking. A fit of coughing followed and Barebones patted his back while exchanging significant looks with Seketwath.

When darkness fell the fires were piled high with brushwood and logs so that the flames rose up to light the gathering in a rosy glow that cast weird shadows on the level grassland.

Then came the entertainment.

Indians, feather-bedecked, their faces and bodies bearing painted designs in red, white and yellow, danced to the clapping of hands and the rhythmic

beating of small drums. Slowly, quickly, shuffling, leaping, twirling—tireless legs moved to the order of the beat.

Fantastic, ridiculous, and yet each movement told a story for those who could read: so Jeremy felt. He whispered to Barebones and Barebones nodded. "Watch now, the dance of the Buffalo."

Jeremy saw the Indian dancers lower their heads as they circled, saw them paw the ground as does the enraged buffalo before charging, and heard the screaming of the previous dance change to the moo of the cow or the bellow of the bull. Every step a word, every move a sentence of the story. Suddenly the dancers ran into the shadows. Their places were taken at once by young braves who, with the utmost skill and agility, gave a wild display of athletics and prowess with their weapons. One item of that entertainment brought a huge grin to William Gammon's face. The young braves engaged in a form of wrestling in which they showed amazing speed and energy, but little skill; at least as William knew it.

"Tire themselves out afore they could get a proper hold," observed William, "an' then agin, Indians be too narrow ribbed for proper wrestlin'. If a Devon man got a grip on 'em 'e'd squeeze them ribs in. I suppose 'ee wouldn't like me to take on one or two, eh, Barebones?"

Barebones, who sat between Jeremy and William, thought it might not be advisable, but he

considered that his people would welcome any instruction, which William might care to impart on the spot at some other time.

"Then I'm their man," said William. "I'll come along and show 'em a trick or two. 'Twould help pass the time."

The festivities went on until the first light of dawn showed faintly above the forest of firs to the East. After speeches by the Governor and Seketwath, the Chief, the people of Perfect Peace made their way back to the settlement.

Three days later the Indians came to Perfect Peace. They brought pack horses heavily laden with the pelts of the fur-bearing animals they had trapped during the winter. They took them to the Meeting Place and laid them, in appropriate piles, upon the floor, ready for inspection by the Governor and members of the Council.

Dicon, accompanied by Barebones, entered the Meeting Place to view the trading.

Seketwath stood aloof from his own people and those of Perfect Peace who were conducting the trading, as if such matters were beneath his dignity.

The Indians, in complete silence, stood by while the Governor and his councillors carefully inspected the pelts. They spoke only in monosyllables when questioned by the white men.

Dicon, with some surprise, noted the Governor

spoke with the Indians in their own language. He anticipated lengthy preliminaries before the actual deal, pelts for grain, should be concluded. Prolonged bargaining, he understood, was the normal and time-honoured procedure.

However, as time went on with negative shakings of heads, shrugging of shoulders, take-it-or-leave-it gestures, Dicon grew somewhat uneasy. The Indians were as well aware of his offer as the Governor and Council of Perfect Peace. Hagglng to such an extent as he now witnessed was becoming farcical. There was no need for it: neither point nor sense.

He looked to Barebones and would have questioned him, but he saw on the Indian's face a reflection of his own complete lack of understanding.

Dicon refrained from putting the question. There would be no point in that either. Barebones was as much in the dark as he was himself, and, if looks were any indication, rather more perturbed.

The bargaining came to a sudden ending. Seketwath spoke sharply in his own language, turned his back on the Governor and walked out of the building. He paused to speak and to raise his hand in salute to Dicon, who, slightly bewildered, returned the salute and asked Barebones what his brother had said.

"He said," answered Barebones, "that he

knows you are a friend of my people, that your words are straight and my people's quarrel is not with you or yours."

Seketwath left the building and Dicon heard the hooves of his horse as he cantered out of the settlement. The remaining Indians, without a word, collected their pelts and presently they too departed.

"The Governor," said Barebones, "demanded ten times the value in pelts for the grain. I do not understand."

"I trust he does not think I am completely foolish," said Dicon shortly. "However, that is something which can be settled once and for all . . . and immediately!"

The Governor was speaking with one of his councillors when Dicon approached him.

"Governor," said Dicon abruptly, "I have no wish to break upon your conversation . . ."

The Governor spoke: "My conversation is of no particular importance, Mister Lovering. I am at your service."

"The cessation of the trading talks, Governor . . . I . . . am somewhat uneasy. I doubt if the Indians are best pleased and there was, as far as I can see, no need for any rift between you and them since I have guaranteed the price, high as it is, for your grain."

"Exactly, Mister Lovering, but I, and my advisers, have our own opinion of the manner

in which commerce shall be conducted. Is it not a sound axiom that the value of any commodity of commerce is worth that which it will fetch in the market? I must ask you, Mister Lovering, to allow us to carry on with our business after our own fashion. You will admit we have rather more experience than you in treating with Indians."

"As you will, Governor, I know not what is in your mind, but I warn you to walk warily. You may have had more experience of treating with Indians than I, but whether or not experience has brought wisdom to you, I cannot say. This I do know, however. You obviously have no intention of trading with the Indians. There can be no question of driving a bargain, for I have undertaken, on behalf of The House of Lovering, to pay whatever price you demand for the grain. You prate of peace and yet you deliberately provoke war. For what it is worth, I say you are riding for a fall and, should you fall, it will be no more than you deserve. I wish you good-day."

Dicon rejoined Barebones and, together, they left the Meeting Place, Dicon recounting the Governor's words. "What fool game does he play, Barebones?" he asked.

"I know not," replied Barebones, "save that it would seem to be foolish. It is certainly puzzling. I will, with your permission, on the

morrow, do my utmost to discover what is happening and the reason for it. Perhaps my brother, Seketwath, will confide in me."

On the following day Barebones rode to the Indian encampment, and when he returned, before night-fall, he was graver than usual.

"What news?" asked Dicon.

"The worst," said Barebones. "It will be war."

"Not while I can make an effort," said Dicon. "I'll have a few more words with the Governor, the stubborn, greed-ridden fool."

"They would be of no avail," said Barebones quietly. "The decision lies no longer with the Governor. The die is cast. My brother's word is given. He is pledged to war."

"I tell you it cannot be," said Dicon. "Don't you understand? There are women here . . . and you know . . . your people . . ."

Barebones drew himself up. "My people do not make war upon women. They need have no fear. You have heard from white men that Indians torture women. That is a lie. 'Tis the white man's way of stirring up hatred against my people—to give an excuse to make war against them and drive them from their land."

* There is little doubt that Barebones spoke no more than the truth. There is no evidence which would bear examination that, in the seventeenth century, the Cummaquid Indians of Massachusetts harmed a single white woman in the many clashes with the settlers.

Dicon felt that Barebones was speaking the truth, and he apologised. "I have been labouring under an evil delusion," he said. "I ask your pardon for my slanderous words, Brother."

Barebones smiled. "I am glad to have relieved your anxiety for the womenfolk, but there can be no hope of preventing war. Why peace cannot be I beg you not to ask me. You will discover it for yourself soon. It is strange that evil should come upon us from an act of goodness."

Barebones would say no more except that Dicon should warn the Governor, though, he added, that warning would be of no little use. Perfect Peace, saving a miracle, was doomed.

The Governor received Dicon's warning calmly. "If the Indians are foolish enough to attack us they must pay the penalty of folly," was all he had to say. He seemed quite unconcerned.

On the face of it, Dicon, whose sympathies were with the Indians, admitted to himself that the Governor had no reason to be anything but confident of the ability of his forces to withstand an Indian attack. Arrows are but poor weapons when opposed to muskets and cannon.

Dicon returned to the guest house where he discussed the future with Jeremy, William and Barebones. It was while they were so talking that Jeremy noticed, when glancing outdoors, a certain unusual activity in the Square: men talking urgently one with the other. And even as

he idly watched, he saw the Governor at the head of four armed men marching across the Square. They came towards the guest house. "Uncle," said Jeremy, "look, something is in the wind." Dicon came to the window just in time to see the party halt at the entrance to the guest house.

Without a knock the Governor flung wide the door and the next second saw him, with the four armed men, in the guest house living-room. The armed men levelled their weapons.

"You are my prisoners," rapped out the Governor.

Dicon drawled: "Honoured! And pray, my dear Governor, would it be an impertinence to enquire of what crime we are guilty?"

"What have you done with Mister Challoner? We know you are in league with the Indians, that you are Challoner's enemy. What have you done with him?"

William pointed to a corner of the room. "Maybe he's hiding down there."

All eyes turned to the mousehole in the corner William had indicated. It was what William had meant them to do. He pounced.

The Governor was gripped and swung round to face the muskets, his body covering William's.

"I be sorry about this 'ere, Governor, seein' that you be older than me, and me being stronger like, but there 'tis. So do 'ee tell y'r men to

drop they muskets or I breaks y'r back, and it's a job not to my liking. Though I'll do it just the same. Come on, Governor, give the word."

"I had better speak," said Barebones gravely as he stepped forward. "A while ago I said to my brother, Mister Lovering, that it was strange that evil should come from an act of mercy. For had Mister Lovering killed James Challoner when they fought together my people would have been at peace with the white settlers. James Challoner is now with my people. He has joined them against you!"

CHAPTER XIX

TREACHERY !

BAREBONES's words brought consternation to the Governor and his armed men.

Barebones continued : " I saw him with my people yesterday. My brother, Seketwath, the Chief, has made a pact with him. You, Governor, have said that the value of a commodity of commerce is the price it can fetch in the market. You value greed. The price of greed means your destruction. There is a story to be told and its telling must be in the presence of the Lady Trevannion."

Partial understanding was coming to Dicon.

" I will go to her," said he. " Governor, order one of your men to accompany me lest I be hindered in my errand by your people crowding round this house. Also, if you give your word to refrain from your ridiculous attempt to hold us prisoners, William, whose prisoner you are, will release you."

" I agree," said the Governor.

Within minutes Dicon returned with Elspeth and Marion for whom he placed chairs, and begged them to be seated. He took Elspeth's hand and Jeremy and William took their places beside them.

Then Barebones spoke.

" My brother, Dicon Lovering, wrote a letter to his agent in Boston making arrangements to purchase your grain at whatever price demanded, in order to help my people.

" You, Governor, did not despatch that letter because it contained a reference to your aims which you feared when you secretly opened and read its contents, might well bring the soldiery here to keep the peace."

" How do you know that ? " cried the Governor.

" My brother Seketwath told me," answered Barebones simply.

" I did not inform Seketwath. You are lying," the Governor shouted angrily.

" I do not lie, Governor. You confided in James Challoner. Challoner told my brother, Seketwath. Were it not for that there would be peace. My people, knowing the grain could not now be purchased except at a ruinous price, decided they must take what they were unable to buy, or starve."

Much was now clear to Dicon. His letter to Boston had not reached its destination and therefore funds from The House of Lovering would not be forthcoming to pay the price demanded for the grain. Seketwath had known this and, faced with war or starvation, he had understandably chosen war.

The Governor was silent.

" James Challoner is an evil man," continued

Barebones evenly, "and he coveted certain valuables. To obtain them he made a pretence of wishing to wed the Lady Trevannion. When that artifice failed he turned traitor to obtain his ends.

"His price for assisting my people to obtain the grain they need is Lady Trevannion's jewels.

"My brother, Seketwath, has been led to believe that the jewels are the property of the Governor of Perfect Peace and not of the Lady Trevannion.

"There, gentlemen, you have the facts. I am a man dedicated to peace and yet I find it hard not to wish that my brother, Dicon Lovering, had not ended the treacherous dog when he might."

Elsbeth rose up. "I want no jewels. Tell your people I give them freely. They are but a small price to prevent useless bloodshed."

"Would that I could," answered Barebones. "My brother Seketwath's word is given and cannot be broken, even to a double-dyed traitor such as James Challoner."

The Governor brought his fist down on the table with a crash.

"You have overlooked the one deciding factor," he cried triumphantly. "The men of Perfect Peace! We can defend our homesteads against ten times the number the Cummaquids can bring against us. Come, men! We waste time here."

Without a word of regret or apology, the Governor left the guest house, followed by his men.

"Um," said Dicon, "he has greater confidence in the defence than I have. Challoner, rogue that he is, is no fool and, therefore, unlikely to join forces with a side fated to fail."

Elsbeth gripped Dicon's hand. "Dicon, think you . . . it will be . . . very terrible?"

"War is not a pretty sight, Elspeth," said Dicon, "but I am assured no harm will be done to the womenfolk, for which I do thank God."

"I am not thinking of myself," said Elspeth.

"On the other hand," said Dicon, "there are such things as bloodless victories. Who knows that we may not have the joy of witnessing one? It is far from being impossible."

"Then," said Elspeth, "good will come from your forbearance after all, for surely this will put an end to the Governor's plans which might well lead to greater bloodshed."

At the mention of the Governor, William turned to Jeremy, tapped his forehead significantly and said: "Barmy, Master Jeremy. That's his trouble—barmy."

CHAPTER XX

THE SIEGE OF PERFECT PEACE

THE folk of Perfect Peace prepared for the attack. Cattle were brought in from the pasture and housed in the byres. The sentries on the gates were doubled and the firing platform on the stockade was manned by day and night. The artillery-men tended their cannon and grimly promised what they would do to the man who had taught them the use of their weapons.

The women turned the Meeting Place into a hospital and prepared to receive the wounded, whilst small boys placed water buckets ready to deal with fire—and wished for more warlike tasks.

There was no fear in Perfect Peace. Men, women and children : all were calm and resolute.

“ We have now only to await the coming of the Indians,” said Jeremy. “ When, Uncle, think you they will come ? ”

“ That,” answered Dicon, “ is what the Governor would like to know. And what I would like to know is the game that Master Traitor Challoner has been up to ? He alone has trained the gunners and, give him credit, he has trained them well ! Time will tell.”

When the attack came, contrary to expectation, it came at noon. A sentry in his watch-

tower gave the alarm as, from three sides the Indians came, yelling their fierce war-cries, their horses at a stretch gallop, riding headlong upon the settlement. Then, before they were in range of musket shot, without checking speed, they turned and circled around the settlement.

The men of Perfect Peace dashed to their action stations and, though the Indians were out of range, the muskets began to crack. Dicon, Jeremy, William and Barebones went to Elspeth and Marion.

"Can we do anything, Dicon?" asked Elspeth. "Can we be of help to anyone?"

"We might, with advantage, play chess," suggested Dicon, "for there is naught else to pass the time away. We have no part in this trickery."

Elspeth looked pointedly at the rapiers Dicon and Jeremy wore, and at William's cutlash.

William answered: "I reckon us have gotten our ticklers just in case we sees that there rogue what calls himself Challoner. Us ain't given him our word . . . so maybe when he comes for your jewels, Miss Elspeth . . . and should us happen to meet him like . . . jewels won't be much use to him . . . where he'd be goin'. . ."

"Forget the jewels, William! Let them go. Not all the jewels in the world will purchase a man's life."

"Maybe not, Miss Elspeth, but seeing as if I meets that there treacherous rogue, jewels or no

jewels, I be goin' to send him straight to Old Nick, us might as well keep the jewels where they belongs."

A thunderous roar which shook the house and caused Elspeth and Marion to start, heralded the opening of cannon fire.

Dicon looked to Jeremy. "Perhaps, Jeremy, you might care to take a look upon the progress of the action and let us know, from time to time, how the situation develops. I am sure Barebones will keep you company. William, you can tell Marion the secrets of your evil boyhood and so keep her amused.

"Now, Elspeth, my dear, to our game! I will set the pieces in their places. Tut-tut, I do wish someone would invent silent cannon, the noise is quite distracting."

Jeremy and Barebones entered the Square as the cannon thundered and recoiled.

"Waste of good ball and powder," said Jeremy. "'Twould be better if the gunners waited until the Indians drew nearer and then fired spread shot or bar and chain."

As Jeremy spoke a gunner raised his hand and called for more powder. Two boys rolled a powder keg into position.

"Fire!"

There was no thunderous roar . . . little more than a sharp cough, a puff of smoke and the ball travelled a bare ten yards.

Furiously the gunners re-loaded and fired, and once again the result was a cough, a puff of smoke, and the ball did little more than drop from the muzzle.

Exultant shrieks came from the Indians as they rode at breakneck speed within bow shot, to send a flight of piercing arrows into the Square before wheeling and riding, once more, out of range.

Barebones looked at Jeremy. "I think we now know how James Challoner has earned the jewels."

"How, Barebones?"

"He alone had complete charge of the armoury and powder magazine. Before he left, I dare suggest, he adulterated the powder, probably by mixing it with sand. You saw what happened when the cannon was fired? It will be the same with the muskets ere long. There, they have attempted to fire the cannon again."

"We must tell Uncle Dicon," said Jeremy excitedly. "Come on, Barebones! I say, look at those gunners. They look utterly dumbfounded. I suppose I should not laugh, but I must confess I should like to. Come on, Barebones."

Dicon listened to Jeremy's excited account of the failure of the cannon fire and Barebones's explanation with a most exasperating composure.

"Um," said Dicon, "so that is how Challoner put the spoke in the wheel: quite ingenious!" He smiled at Elspeth. "We can now concentrate upon our game, Cousin. Your move, middear.

Oh, Jeremy, should the Cummaquids break the stockade, return here out of the way of arrows and the nasty noises of war."

For a moment Jeremy was at a loss. Had he heard his uncle aright? He caught William's eye, and he understood. The womenfolk must not be allowed to contemplate the possibility of danger threatening. Presently the arrows would be flying thickly . . . fire arrows . . .

Jeremy answered casually: "Out of the way of arrows, Uncle? Nasty noises? The engagement, Uncle, is rather less noisy than your game of chess. I say, Barebones, shall we go and have a laugh at those gunners?"

Out in the Square Jeremy drew a deep breath. "I nearly said the wrong thing that time, Barebones."

"But you did not," answered Barebones.

The Indians were riding in a narrower circle, their yells were louder and their arrows flew more thickly.

And the defenders were no longer sure of themselves. The cannon had failed. . . .

They were holding their musket fire. Every shot must count. The powder in their powder horns was unadulterated, but when that was used up . . .

The Governor was talking earnestly with a few members of the Council. He emphasised his words with blows of right fist upon palm of left hand.

"The white men," said Barebones, "though knowing they are betrayed and facing great odds, are not afraid. They are brave men, which makes the greater pity since the world can ill-afford to lose brave men."

"When will come the real attack?" asked Jeremy.

"It will come, when come it does, by night," answered Barebones, "for that is the way of my people. They will draw near under cover of darkness and they will start fires with flaming arrows."

As Barebones gave his opinion a fierce screaming of the Indians was followed by the whistling flight of a shower of arrows.

A musketeer dropped on the firing platform without a groan. His musket clattered down to the ground as he plucked ineffectively at the arrow transfixing his breast. Then he lay still.

Another arrow skimmed above the Governor's head and stuck, quivering, in the wooden wall of a nearby house. The Governor ignored the whine of its passing and the thud of its impact upon timber. The councillors involuntarily ducked their heads.

Seeing the defender drop stricken on the firing platform, the Governor picked up the fallen musket and took the dead man's place. The nearest defenders cheered him.

"The odds are against us," the Governor cried,

"but when beset, as we shall be, our arms are strong and our steel is keen. We shall hold out!"

The Governor charged the musket and stood, keen-eyed and with steady hands, to await a target worth a little of the precious powder that remained.

When it came he fired, and seeing an Indian topple from a galloping horse, the Governor stood up straight to shake his fist triumphantly at the yelling enemy which threatened the settlement.

Maybe it was natural that he should voice his feelings and cry defiance, but it was certainly unwise to expose himself as he did. Four Indians stretched their bows and four arrows sped towards him.

Two struck harmlessly into the stockade. One tore through the crown of the Governor's high sugar-loaf hat.

The other sped truly home.

The Governor sank to his knees. Jeremy and Barebones reached the firing platform together. David Smith, the councillor, was hard on their heels.

The Governor, white faced, but conscious, bit upon his under lip to hold back the cry of agony. Gallantly he essayed a smile. He spoke in choking gasps: "I am hard hit . . . and . . . I . . . feel . . . that my journey ends here."

He recognised Jeremy. "Fetch . . . your uncle . . . boy . . . I . . . I . . ."

The effort was too great, and the Governor sank back into the arms of the councillor.

Dicon came on Jeremy's word, whilst William remained with Elspeth and Marion. He knelt by the dying Governor.

" 'Tis you . . . Lovering . . . and in time. I have used you ill . . . Forgive me . . . I beg."

" Naught to forgive, Governor. Rest and take it gently. We'll have you back on your legs again. Your wound is nothing desperate," lied Dicon.

Again the Governor smiled. " Lovering . . . I . . . have been in error. Save . . . the settlement . . . and the people from destruction . . . before it is . . . too late. Promise."

" I will do my utmost, Governor . . . that I will promise," answered Dicon.

" 'Tis well . . . I believe you will succeed. . . . Pray for me . . . Lovering . . . for I am in need of prayer . . . I . . . a sinner."

Then for a moment the Governor's eyes shone brightly and he smiled, and so smiling, he died.

" I think, Uncle Dicon, the Governor was happy . . . in the last moments. He was very brave," said Jeremy slowly.

" Aye, lad. He was brave enough. He was, you recall, from Hartland: a Devon man."

Dicon turned to David Smith. " Councillor, you heard the Governor? Will you give me a free hand? If not Perfect Peace is doomed to

destruction by fire . . . and your Governor will have died in vain. Will you speak with the other members of the Council ? ”

“ It goes against the grain, Mister Lovering, to acknowledge defeat, though reason tells me it is inevitable. I will speak with the Council.”

Within ten minutes the Council had met, debated and come to a decision. Dicon was given a free hand.

“ Lay down all arms,” said Dicon as he removed his baldrick and rapier.

“ I will go to the Indians with my nephew and my Indian brother, Tallwahma. Order the stockade gates to be opened and when we have gone, close them behind us.”

Unarmed, Dicon, Jeremy and Barebones walked out into the open ground where the Indians rode and shot arrows into the beleaguered settlement.

Barebones held up his right hand and called out in a loud voice. A dozen Indians galloped towards him and reined up sharply. Again Barebones spoke and Dicon heard and recognised one word only : Seketwath.

Two Indians rode away and they returned with their Chief, Seketwath, leading them. To him Barebones spoke long and earnestly, and Seketwath replied, at length.

“ My brother,” said Barebones, “ rejoices that there shall be no more bloodshed. He wants the grain for our people and for that he will pay a

right and proper price in pelts. He does not rob any man, red or white.

"He is not happy to take the jewels but he has given his word and that he cannot break."

"It is well," said Dicon, "and understood. Might I ask where is Challoner?"

Barebones said shortly, and contemptuously, "He awaits his reward. He comes not to claim it."

Seketwath spoke again and Barebones translated his words.

"My brother, the Chief, will come tomorrow for the jewels and will bring the pelts to purchase the grain."

Dicon bowed to Seketwath and offered his hand. Seketwath took the offered hand, then raised his in salute, wheeled his horse, and called to his braves. The Cummaquids galloped away.

The siege of Perfect Peace was raised.

CHAPTER XXI

WILLIAM'S PLAN

THREE days after the Governor's death, the Indians, having purchased the grain at a fair price, rode away to the West to take up their winter quarters in the hunting grounds. And behind them they left friends.

Dicon gave the situation much thought. He proposed to the Council that the matter of the Indian attack should be forgotten ; never called to mind and never mentioned. For, to do so, he argued, would be to invite investigation by the authorities in Boston from which no good would result. The Indians were not enemies, they were friends. Why antagonise them ?

The wisdom of the course was apparent. It was agreed that the past should be buried and forgotten. It was also agreed that the precious jewels should be forgotten. Except by William. " I'll not say a word about 'em," said he, " but I shan't forget. They be Miss Elspeth's and I feels it in me bones that there Challoner and me'll meet again. And when us does . . . then us'll see."

Jeremy was concerned only with the future. " What happens next ? " he asked.

" We came, Jeremy, to explore the possibility of expanding commerce. And that, my lad, is

what we are going to do. This is a great and new world where there are untold riches for the taking . . . and all for man's weal. Timber, Jeremy, and waterways to transport it to the coast for shipment to Europe; grass lands to graze enough cattle to feed a world; rich arable land for corn, corn which can be carried to overseas markets. And what ores lie unseen beneath our feet? There is adventure and romance in this New World, Jeremy. It is indeed a New England, another England across the seas where Englishmen can endeavour greatly and achieve much. So, Jeremy, since we are in no hurry, we will remain here and establish trade within the settlement. And, I hope, we may in some way bring a little joy into the people's lives."

"Mister Dicon," said William to Jeremy, "ain't going to find it 'ard for to get the folks o' this here Perfect Peace to go in for tradin' in a proper manner, but it ain't goin' to be so easy to get 'em to enjoy 'emselves: they've lived miserable like for too long."

And in that William made no error.

A new Council was elected and not one member was there who was not quick to see the advantages Dicon offered. Dicon would appoint an agent to work in Perfect Peace as a representative of The House of Lovering. There would then be a guaranteed market for all their products and,

should they wish to develop new industries, the money was at their disposal for the purchase of whatever instruments and tools were required.

Further, Dicon stipulated that all men should be rewarded according to their efforts. Their earnings should be their own, to use as they wished for their own benefit, except for a small percentage to be deducted for the upkeep of the settlement, a form of just taxation. There were no dissenters.

But as William had said, the settlers showed no wish to be happy, or enjoy themselves, in any form.

“ They got, Master Jeremy,” said William, “ the wrong idea of being good. They thinks as if a chap be ’appy then ’e must be wicked. ’Tis like that there old wives’ tale about medicine. They reckons as if medicine don’t taste nasty it don’t do y’ no good. ’Tis a lot o’ old rummage ! Us ’a’ got to teach ’em, Master Jeremy.”

And William set about ‘ teaching ’em ’ in his own way.

Knowing well that the game of kyles* was considered sinful, William made pins, set them up on the Square and invited Jeremy to play a match against him. Just as he expected, he was taken to task by one of the Elders, Mister David

* A form of the game we now call Ninepins, but instead of throwing a ball to knock down the pins, a short thick stick was used.

Smith, and told he offended against God, for kyles was a sinful game.

"Mister," replied William, "I goes by the Good Book, and it don't say naught about kyles bein' sinful there. Where be the sin in knockin' down nine bits o' wwood with another bit o' wood? It gives us a laugh and there ain't no sin in laughin'. But I'll tell 'ee this, Mister, 'tis good to laugh, that it be. When men laugh, Mister, they be 'appy, and when they're 'appy they ain't got room for 'atred in their 'earts. So if you wants peace and good will among men, keep 'em laughin'."

Against such devastating logic Mister Smith could find no answer.

William Gammon proceeded to carry his beliefs into the opposite camp.

"I b'ain't no preacher," William would say, "I be an ignorant and simple sailor, but I knows what I knows to be truthful. God didn't make this 'ere world and trick it out with beautiful things like rivers and mountains, girt trees and little trees, and flowers and green fields, if He didn't want us for to enjoy 'em and be 'appy, no my! And it ain't fitting that you should insult God as y' do, though without knowin', y' bein' ignorant like me, only in a different sort o' way. You looks upon God as a sort of cruel tyrant who fair 'ates the sight o' us poor critters and all He thinks about is punishin' us for naught, which b'ain't true no'ow.

“ It says in the Good Book as God is Love and, as He loves us, then He ain’t goin’ to make us miserable. And we knows as God is our Father. Fathers don’t go ill-treating their youngsters, leastways if they be proper fathers. No my! Good fathers wants to see the tackers ’appy and good. If tackers b’ain’t good they can’t be ’appy, and that’s only common sense.”

But William only received grave and tolerant smiles and an occasional warning to mend his ways or he would have a lot to answer for on Judgement Day.

Martha Hunkin supplied the answer to William’s problem. “ William Gammon, you’re a ninny! Leave the old ’uns be. Try your preaching on the lads, leastways let your preaching be games as’ll make ’em laugh. Teach ’em wrestlin’, football, rounders and the like. Get the youngsters and the old ’uns ’ll follow.”

“ Martha,” said William, “ you be a most intelligent woman, that you be. I bows afore your wisdom.”

William let it be known that he wished to teach the lads of Perfect Peace the art of wrestling. Since wrestling was not considered a deadly sin, the puritanical parents raised no objections. So every day, outside the stockade, William taught the craft. And he did so with a twinkle in his eye and a joke on his lips.

Within a week, parents strolled casually out

of the stockade to watch their lads' progress and skill. And William noted, with glee, that more than one solemn paternal countenance broke into a smile at his quips.

Then came the day when Mister Zebedee Megson, easily the most puritanical of the whole community, came to inspect William's efforts. Mister Megson was not old: a mere thirty-five. And he was big and strong.

"Be an honour to see y'," said William. "Proper joyful I be at the sight o' y'. Now it be a real bit o' good fortune as y've a come at this very time, seein' as you be such a fine powerful man. If so be y'd be kind enough, y' could help me show the lads a little throw as I'd like 'em to know."

Mister Megson permitted himself a smile. He disapproved of William Gammon and he had it in mind that he might well accomplish William's discomfiture before an appreciative audience.

"Right willingly, Sailor," he answered. "I am not without knowledge of the craft."

From the outset William was aware of Mister Megson's intentions, and he grinned happily. "Now y' watches me careful, lads," he called out. "Y' see what the gentleman be about. 'E's tryin' to get the under grip and kick me left leg away with his right. Now then. Watch!"

Suddenly Mister Megson found himself powerless in a hold which, if William chose to exploit,

would send him headlong to the turf. He waited for the crash. It did not come.

"There y' are, me lads," cried William. "Now y' see 'ow 'tis done. But bless y'r heart, I b'ain't goin' to 'urt Mister Megson. All done by kindness, middears. Gentle and lovin' as any cooin' dove be William Gammon."

So saying he exerted a little pressure. Mister Megson was across his knee and, gently, William patted him two or three times, saying: "There y' are, middears, now Mister Megson knows the way to give y' a spanking if so be you'm naughty. Thank y', Mister Megson, kindly."

He set the Elder free and bowed. Then for the first time, William Gammon heard unrestrained laughter, from the boys and the watching parents alike.

"Martha," said William later that day, "I said as 'ow you was a most intelligentical woman, and I'll say it' again. I've a-broke the ice. They've been a-laughin'."

As William said, he had broken the ice. He made a football, a huge thing of cow hide stuffed with clouts and hay. The game was simple. The ball was merely placed on the centre of the Square, the players divided equally, with the object of the players on the North side to force the ball, by kicking and pushing, through the South gate, and players of the South side to force it through the North Gate.

If it was simple it was not gentle.

The game was played regularly. Hands, feet, fists were used in wild abandon, and if there were a few blooded noses, hacked shins and swollen ears, who cared? What mattered a few bruises to boys who were boys?

And by way of a change, they played hilarious games of rounders and tip-cat.

Then, one or two parents who had stood by to watch the football joined in, until came the day when, with triumph in his heart, William arranged a football match in which boys and fathers alike took part, North against South. William had won.

Elspeth, abetted by Marion, set out to bring smiles and joy into the lives of the womenfolk and the little girls. As a beginning, Elspeth interested them in embroidery and the making of tapestries, using the Meeting Place as a classroom and, being a woman talking to women, she spoke of the London fashions, of silks and satins. The women listened and thought of brave fineries; comparing them with their own drab dresses they sighed wishfully.

Thus Elspeth sowed the seeds.

"The boys are having great fun," she said; "let us give the maidens some enjoyment. Why not make some gay dresses for them?"

Soon the little girls had their gay dresses, and then very slowly—a little bit here and a little bit

there—colour appeared in the womenfolks' dresses. Eventually they completely discarded their black and wore gay colours, and in the weaving sheds they laughed as they wove yet brighter colours into the cloth of their making.

The winter came with dark clouds and biting winds from the North, and the fall of snow, to be followed by frost.

But the girls and boys did not stay indoors. A father recalled his boyhood days and made a sledge, whilst others recalled the snowball fights of the years gone by. There was fun to be taken in the winter, and they took it. William talked of music and dancing : of the sailor's jig and the ways the seamen kept their hearts high upon the wide and lonely seas during long voyages.

Men remembered that once they had played upon reed or viol, so that long-forgotten musical instruments were brought out from hidden places into the light and used again.

Barebones was content to look on and occasionally display a quiet and understanding amusement.

Christmas came with prayers of thanksgiving, feasting and a dance in the Meeting Place. Dicon and Elspeth twirled and whirled on light and nimble feet to the squeak of the reeds and the scrape of the viols. William pranced and capered, and Martha Hunkin bobbed and jigged, as sprightly as any girl, and so did the folk of

Perfect Peace : women and men, girls and boys. Maybe they had forgotten the steps of the measures, maybe their feet were heavy and uncertain, but what mattered such small things? They laughed as they danced, which was all that did matter. They were gay again and life was good.

Elsbeth smiled at Dicon. "I know not what benefits these people will gain from your commercial projects, Dicon, but we have given them something greater—the joy of laughter."

The winter months passed. By day, menfolk laboured in the forests felling timber, and in the evenings they took their ease and pleasure.

Time passed quickly, and the first sun of spring came breaking through the sky's grey covering, to banish the bite of frost and the white waste of snow. Quickly the grass began to show young and freshly green, and the birds sang their praise to the wonder of the sun.

The sowing of crops began. And when May came with blue skies and soft winds, the tilling of the land had been completed.

Where there had been a gallows tree in the Settlement square, there stood a maypole upon which dancing maidens plaited gaily coloured ribbons.

It was in June that Robert Hamilton came to Perfect Peace.

"I bring good news, Dicon," he announced.

"King James has fled from England. Mary, his daughter, with her husband, William of Orange, rules our country. There is no hindrance to your return to England. Your father tells me that young Jeremy's parents followed William of Orange from Holland and are now back in their old home once more. Now I beg of you, Dicon, tell me how you have fared? Have you succeeded in establishing trade? And have you discovered the mystery of the red-haired lady or the pirates' hidden hoard of precious stones? I am vastly curious, Dicon, and not without reason."

"We have fared well, Robert," laughed Dicon; "we have made good progress in our talks upon trading—of which you will learn more later; the mystery of the red-haired lady is solved and there is no hidden hoard of precious stones. But, come, I will present you to the lady."

Dicon, keeping his face straight, took Robert to Elspeth's lodging and in fine and ceremonious tones said: "May I present to you, Cousin, my good friend, Mister Robert Hamilton of Boston."

"Robert, my kinswoman, the Lady Elspeth Trevannion, who has done me the inestimable honour of accepting my unworthy self as her future husband."

And, as he had expected, Dicon witnessed what had never before been known: a situation in which Mister Robert Hamilton was too taken aback to find words suitable for the occasion.

But, when Dicon and Robert were alone, Robert said : " I notice your erstwhile comrade, James Challoner, is not with you, Dicon."

" He, er . . . has left us," said Dicon.

" That, my dear Dicon, is nothing new. Incidentally, you may recall you advanced him certain monies on a note drawn upon his bankers? Does it surprise you to know that the bankers have communicated with us? They had a customer, a Mister Challoner, but the signature of our Mister Challoner does not match that of their Mister Challoner. In short, Dicon, you have been stung ! "

" I rather imagined I had been," said Dicon. " It is of no import."

" But the matter of the hidden hoard, Dicon? You have not exactly told me all. I have heard that a certain person, whose description greatly resembles our erstwhile comrade, purchased a fine vessel at Cape Cod. He paid for it . . . with precious stones."

" In that case, I think it would be advisable to confide in you, Robert, but let it be understood, what I say is for your ear alone."

And when his story was done, Dicon said : " I wonder who Challoner was, in truth? We shall never know, alas, and I am vastly curious."

CHAPTER XXII

ABOARD 'THE ANNE' AGAIN

HOMEWARD bound !

With a fair and following wind, her canvas full and the bow wave creaming, breaking to hiss past the sides to be lost in the churning wake, 'The Anne's' prow parted the tumbling waters of the deep seas.

Captain John Coombe, Captain and Master of the tall vessel, content, though with ever a keen and critical eye, stood at the poop rail and saw that all was well.

"You have, Jeremy," said the Captain, "been sadly off your course this last year with your gallivanting in the wilds of New England, and much lost time must be made up. I refer to your studies of the Science of Navigation."

"My uncle," said Jeremy, as he looked towards Dicon and Elspeth who walked together on the main deck, talking happily, "being so much otherwise engaged these days, I had hoped to employ my time more amusingly, but it would seem I have only escaped from one tyranny to another."

Captain Coombe laughed. "You will have no Miss Jennifer Rutherford to keep you company on the voyage either, my lad, since, as you have been informed, Mister Rutherford sailed from Barbados shortly after you began your travels in

New England. I understand that he and Jennifer will be returning to the Island a little later this year, leaving Mistress Rutherford in England where the climate is 'more suitable to her state of health.'

Away forward, William Gammon spun splendid yarns, not too hampered by any adherence to strict veracity, of his own adventures in the hinterland of Massachusetts.

And open-mouthed seamen drank in his every word.

"Never," said William, "did anybody ever see such a gigantical crittur. That there bear, ten foot high it stood, comes towards me . . . and me without a weapon. Now if I'd a got me old cutlash . . . which I hadn't, 'twould 'a' been easy. What does I do . . .? I tell y', ship-mates :

"I slips in under its girt arms . . . There's only one thing as I can do, I sees it in a flash—the flyin' mare! In I goes . . . an' the next second that there bear goes clean over me 'ead an' comes down with a wallop as shakes the fir trees to their roots . . ."

Dicon spoke with Elspeth. "Yes, that's the way of it. We will return to Massachusetts and we will build another Langley Barton. It is a great country, middear, another England. We shall be the Loverings of Langley Barton, Devon, and of Langley Barton, Massachusetts. And

what of the seas? We will bridge the seas with our vessels. We will live in peace with the Indians, work with them . . . work for them. I've discussed it all with 'Barebones. Aye, Elspeth, we shall find a great joy and, I believe, accomplish much for the good of all."

"And, Dicon, no man may do more," answered Elspeth simply. "We will pray, you and I, and I know God will help us."

William's fantastic story was suddenly interrupted. Marion Hunkin came from below decks, holding her skirts and screaming: "William Gammon. Come you at once. . . . I do declare I've seen a girt rat in Miss Elspeth's cabin. Do y' come at once!"

William saw the grins on the faces of those who listened to the story of his fight with the bear, and Sam Yeo, the Master Gunner, said, with a wink, to his shipmates: "Proper hero, our Bosun! No wild animals can scare him! Bears and rats—all the same to him! William, don't forget y'r old cutlash this time. They rats in 'The Anne' be proper fierce."

William hurried off to obey Marion's call. Marion was not one with whom it was advisable to argue.

The voyage continued with a fair wind and a clear sky, but on the morning of the seventh day out of Boston, at three of the clock, the keen ears of the starboard look-out caught the sound of distant rumbling to the east.

It could have been thunder but the sky was clear, the stars shone brightly, and the air had not the heavy breathlessness of thundery weather, but was sharp and clear.

"Pass the word along," cried the look-out to the helmsman. "'Tis gun-fire or I be a Cornishman!"

Captain Coombe came on deck.

"Aye, 'tis gun-fire," said he. "Dim all lights on deck. Give my compliments to Mister Dicon and ask him to come up on deck."

"Well, John," said Dicon, "do we keep clear?"

"Aye, Dicon, as is our way!" and thereupon Captain Coombe gave the helmsman orders to change course and so steer towards the distant boom of cannon fire. With a hearty and glad-some "Aye, aye, Sir", the helmsman changed course and 'The Anne' heeled to the rudder and sped towards a promise of conflict.

Below decks, seamen tumbled from hammocks and cleared the gun-deck for action.

"I think, John," said Dicon, "we shall come upon a running fight. Were it not so, the gun-fire would have sounded more clearly before this."

"Aye, Dicon. Belike a merchant vessel tries to escape some privateer in darkness, but the night is too bright."

A red flash stabbed upwards upon the horizon. Another . . . then another.

"We are coming up on them," said John Coombe, "cannon flash."

The dawn broke swiftly. The look-out on the foremast hailed the deck. "

"Two, eh?" said Dicon, "and one closes on the other. We are sailing out of the dawn and may not be sighted."

Seamen raced up rigging and shook out canvas from the yards, with the industry of ants and the agility of monkeys.

With every stitch of canvas set 'The Anne' tore through the waves, and her timbers quivered like the muscles of a living thing. Muskets were issued, grapnel and boarding nets were set ready for use, protecting fenders flung over the bulwarks and the gunners stood by their weapons.

Dicon went below.

"I must beg of you, Elspeth, to keep in your cabin for a little while. I ask you simply because we may have a little action and, while there can be no danger, you would, middear, perhaps be somewhat in the way of the men as they perform their duties."

"If there should be any seamen injured, Dicon, I may tend them? That is a woman's duty. I thank you all the same for attempting to comfort me with your assurance that no danger threatens. I am not afraid."

"Um," said Dicon, "what danger there is, is not for us!"

Out of the dawn came 'The Anne', unseen. Two vessels were grappled, and one, the greater, flew the Skull and Crossbones at her peak.

"Our guns," said Captain Coombe, "are now rendered useless. We cannot sink one without t'other. Well, Dicon?"

"We go alongside," said Dicon, "and then—away boarders! Bring her up as-best you can, John, sweep her decks with scatter shot and then 'tis the steel: close work it is!"

"Aye, Dicon! That is the way of it. We board her by the bows. She cannot use her broadside against us. 'Tis well, Dicon?"

"Aye, 'tis well, John. That's the way of it."

Seamen, barefooted, crowded for'ard to crouch close against the bulwarks. Boarding nets and grapnels lay at hand. William Gammon, with his beloved cutlash held lovingly in his mighty right fist, said: "Where be Master Jeremy, Mister Dicon? He be proper mazed to have a cut at they pirate dogs. Reckoned as it 'ud be right and proper to use that rapier you gived 'im—but 'twill be bloody work and Master Jeremy b'ain't very old."

"He will be . . . er . . . guarding Miss Elspeth and Marion," said Dicon. "He is, as you say, rather young for this. But I doubt he will be best pleased with me."

"He won't," said William shortly, "but this ain't no place for 'im yet a while."

A round shot kicked up a spurt of water short of 'The Anne's' bows.

"They've spotted us, William," said Dicon. "Now the rest is for John Coombe to bring us alongside. Stand by, me lads."

"What'll us do with the prize money, Mister Dicon, when us captures that there pirate?" asked one Devon seaman.

"Better way start by payin' me that crown as y' borrowed from me over to Africky three years ago," came the answer from another seaman.

The lads laughed and another said: "Reckon I'll get that there roll of flowered silk my wife's been a-plaguing me for these four years. Wants me to go to Church on Sundays all dressed up like the gentry."

"Then do 'ee buy a feather to put in y'r bonnet to keep 'er proper company," called yet another seaman, as he felt the edge of his cutlash.

With masterly seamanship, Captain Coombe brought 'The Anne' into action so that she presented no target for the pirate's broadsides. Cannon shot came only from the pirate's culverin on her bows.

'The Anne's' canvas flapped and fluttered . . . her forward swivel guns blazed and blasted the pirate's fo'c'sle with scatter shot. Then came the grinding of timbers and 'The Anne' was alongside, her bowsprit straddling the privateer.

Boarding nets and grapnels joined 'The Anne'

and the privateer. "Away boarders!" With a cheer the Devon seamen swarmed aboard the privateer.

Dicon and William dropped lightly on the deck and were joined by Jeremy.

"I hid myself beneath a tarpaulin, Uncle . . . I had to come."

The steel blades flashed, cut and thrust, and cleared a way before them. 'The Anne's' boarding party established a footing and was soon reinforced. Steadily, shoulder to shoulder, a very fighting machine, foot by foot, the seamen advanced. There was no stopping them. They were trained, disciplined fighting men, and against their steady advance the pirates broke before them as the waves upon the cliffs of Devon.

William, as he cut down a yelling pirate, grinned. "Proper job! Doin' this 'ere bit o' work with the steel puts money into empty pockets. Us don't 'arm the ship. Ah, would 'ee now? Clumsy you be, middear." William turned aside a sword thrust and slashed at the thruster. "Pretty work, Master Jeremy! Nice a point as ever I did see. Now that there weapon o' yours'll need be cleaned. I'll do it for 'ee . . . when this business be over."

Dicon parried and lunged with the seemingly careless, though deadly, ease of the true sword-master. And above all the clash of steel came the

cheers of the seamen as they drove steadily forward.

"They'm breakin', Mister Dicon. They'm goin' over the side. . . . Too 'ot for 'em, the dogs!" shouted William.

"Aye," said Dicon, "they're breaking. We'll board the merchantman next' . . . there's fighting going on aboard her. Steady, me lads, steadily does it. All well, Jeremy?"

"Aye, Uncle . . . Well indeed . . . I am forgiven?"

"Serious crime . . . mutiny. Hang 'em from the yardarm . . . for mutiny. In your case . . . four hours' extra study . . . the Science of Navigation . . .!"

Aboard the merchantman, seamen still fighting, though greatly outnumbered, raised a cheer and fought on grimly with greater heart.

"Come on, me lads. Follow me!"

So calling, Dicon leapt for the merchantman's deck.

"You be in time . . . please God . . ." cried a wounded merchant seaman. "There be . . . passengers below decks . . . women . . . and a maiden . . . They pirate curs . . ."

Nothing more was needed. The wounded man's words brought a snarl from William and terrible cries from the seamen. Plying their weapons with all their skill, with all their strength and without mercy, the lads from 'The Anne' smashed

down resistance. There came cries from below deck. . . .

Before a locked cabin door two seamen and a tall middle-aged man, swords in hand, fought desperately against a dozen pirates.

And that middle-aged man was Mister Rutherford, Planter of Barbados!

Jeremy all but choked, for he knew who was behind the locked door. . . .

He sprang forward. And a pirate turned, his eyes gleaming with a mad hatred. He saw . . . and recognised . . .

The man they had known as James Challoner raised his pistol and fired, and Jeremy, without a cry, fell forward upon his face.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOMeward bound

DICON was quick, but William was quicker.

As Jeremy fell, from William's lips came an awful cry of anguish and blind rage. Like some avenging Colossus, irresistible and inexorable, William raised his stained blade, and, with all the strength of his muscle-knotted arm, struck.

No second stroke was needed.

He dropped to his knees beside Jeremy.

"Oh, middear . . . me boy . . . Master Jeremy . . . do 'ee say summat, lad."

Dicon, white-faced, kneeling beside him, spoke :
"He lives, William, God be thanked. The ball has taken him high in the body. We must tend him while he is still unconscious and has no feeling."

Mister Rutherford, without a word, knocked upon the cabin door. "Open, Jennifer. 'Tis safe," he called.

The cabin door opened slowly and a young girl peered out.

Gently as any woman, William Gammon raised Jeremy up and took him to the cabin over which Mister Rutherford had stood guard.

Within the cabin were two women and the girl, a maid of fifteen, who, on seeing William's burden, swayed as if she would fall and then, recovering

herself, forced a kerchief to her mouth to silence a sob.

Dicon tried to smile at her and then looked meaningly at her father.

"Come, Jennifer," said Mister Rutherford, "you shall return when Jeremy's wound has been dressed."

Jennifer suffered herself to be led away and the two women followed.

"William," said Dicon, "send a couple of the lads to get bowls and water, and you go to the Captain's cabin for what leech's tools and bandages he may have. Waste no time, William."

"Aye, aye, Mister Dicon."

Upon the bunk Jeremy lay motionless and white, like one already dead. Dicon's face was as white as his nephew's, but his jaw was set and his hands steady. Two of the lads, on tip-toe, came to the cabin bearing bowls and water-carriers. One, Sam Yeo, whispered hoarsely: "Mister Dicon, sir . . . Master Jeremy, 'e'll not . . . ?" He left the word unsaid.

"Please God," Dicon answered quietly, "he will live."

William came with bandages and a small mahogany-wood box.

"'Ere y' be, Mister Dicon. The tools be in this ere box."

For fifteen minutes Dicon worked, cutting and probing; then he found and removed the ball.

"Bandages, William," he muttered, "and we're done."

"'E'll live, Mister Dicon? Don't 'ee go nor to say . . . as . . ."

"It is with God," replied Dicon, "but I think he will, for he is young and strong, and God is merciful."

"Aye, Mister Dicon, aye, that He be. Bless me soul I've got something in me eyes; must be dust or summat." William passed his forearm across his eyes.

Dicon smiled. "Maybe 'tis the same kind of dust that is plaguing mine," he said.

Then Dicon started. "William, I am ashamed. I have put my nephew's needs before the needs of the lads. There are wounded to tend and I have neglected them; betrayed my duty."

William shook his head. "B'ain't true, Mister Dicon. I'd a told 'ee o' the lads, seein' as it be the lads 'as allus 'as to come first, if I 'adn't known as Cap'n Coombe and the Cap'n o' this 'ere vessel wasn't a doin' all as is needed for 'em. So there y' be."

"'Tis well, William, though I do not account myself exonerated. I had not known my lads were being tended."

"Y' forgot, no more, and I'd a told 'ee if it 'ad been necessary. Stands to reason, seein' Master Jeremy as 'e was—well, there y' are. And anyways, Mister Dicon, us ain't got any as y' might say be

really 'urted. Little old wounds, nine o' the lads took, as'll be all to rights afore us reaches England and as won't stop 'em spendin' the prize money us'll get."

"Then we will tend to our other duties, William. There are the pirate prisoners who must be chained and guarded: to await trial when we reach port."

William grinned. "What prisoners, Mister Dicon? Now don't 'ee start a thinkin' about what ain't got to be thought about. Pirates be pirates and gets hanged sooner or later if they don't get killed afore 'and, these 'ere pirates, why they gets killed afore 'and which goes for to save time and trouble. Y' see, Mister Dicon, the lads 'eard about Master Jeremy and, seein' as they got a sort o' likin' for 'im, well 'twasn't a bit o' good they pirate dogs askin' for quarter, if you sees what I mean."

"I see," answered Dicon quietly.

"I was sure y' would," said William, "but there 'appens to be one as ain't quite dead yet awhile, though 'e's on the way to Old Nick pretty fast. Looks to me as if 'e's a cut above the ordinary pirate dog. 'E's a lying just outside, alongside that there Challoner, mutterin' to 'imself."

"Let us see him," said Dicon.

The pirate was all but spent. Dicon knelt beside him. There was lace at his throat and wrists and his coat was of fine brocade.

Dicon raised him up and his eyes opened. "The Duke," he whispered, "killed! I had not believed he could have been killed. I did not believe . . . when I heard . . . 'The Duchess' had gone and he had not. But now . . . he is . . . dead."

"The Duke?" asked Dicon.

The stricken man's head turned slowly and looked upon the body of the man Dicon had known as James Challoner.

"He was my friend," said the dying pirate, "I was his mate."

"Aboard 'The Duchess'?" asked Dicon.

"Aye, but not when she was sunk. I was sick of a fever and . . . remained ashore. But the Duke was safe. He was cast away from 'The Duchess' before she went down. The crew quarrelled about a division of spoils . . . mutiny . . . and he was cast away and rescued. . . . He sought me out and we found a ship and a crew." The pirate's eyes closed and his breath fluttered.

All was now clear to Dicon.

"Tell me," he whispered urgently, "who was the Duke."

A gleam of intelligence returned to the pirate's eyes and he shook his head wearily.

His words came slowly, spoken with great effort, and faintly. Dicon placed his ear close to the man's lips.

"I only know that he was a gentleman . . .

who went wrong. 'Tis all I ever did know for certain. . . . And now he has gone. 'Twas said he was a Lord or a real Duke who was robbed of his birthright . . . and who set out to take vengeance as best he might. Some folk said . . .” The pirate’s words trailed off, and giving one long deep sigh, he too had gone.

“Now us’ll never know,” said William.

“’Tis as well, William. Let the story die with him. He had the grace to remember his deeds would bring disgrace to his kin, and from that he saved them. ’Tis to his credit.”

While Dicon and William stood in silence looking down upon what had been the Duke, Mister Rutherford approached. Anxiously he said one word: “Jeremy?”

Dicon nodded.

“Thank God, Lovering. I do thank God. Think you upon that lad and that twice he has come between my maiden and death. It has been ordained. She wishes to see him. May she?”

“To be sure,” answered Dicon.

Mister Rutherford hurried away and returned with Jennifer.

Jennifer looked up at Dicon.

“’Tis well, Jennifer, ’tis well,” he said quickly. Then he took her hand and raised it to his lips. “I give you greeting, Mistress,” he said gaily.

Jennifer curtsied. “Good-day to you, Sir.” It was a brave effort for her lips were quivering.

But she could control herself no longer—the tears would not be held back.

Said Dicon lightly : “ And since we have observed the ritual of polite society, I am reminded that I would have it the more sincere. For it is in my mind that you should name me Uncle and I should name you Jennifer, and that we shall, in future, greet each other, thus ! ”

And Dicon kissed the maiden on both cheeks, and did not dry her tears that had fallen upon his face.

“ I will go,” she said, “ with your permission, to tend to Jeremy.”

“ Aye, Jennifer, and so you shall. What better sight than your pretty face for the lad when he returns from the shadows ? ”

She went into the cabin and closed the door quietly behind her.

Mister Rutherford looked at Dicon. “ Jennifer is fifteen, Lovering, and nigh to womanhood.”

Dicon Lovering replied : “ And Jeremy is but a year or two more, Rutherford, and is already, I think, something of a man.”

“ A fine lad and a fine maiden, my dear Lovering.”

“ Exactly, my dear Rutherford. And young first love is very sweet.”

“ There will be no other love for those two, Lovering. Theirs has been ordained.”

William Gammon grunted disapprovingly. He

leaned down and picked up a rapier lying in the scuppers. "I reckon Master Jeremy 'll be proper glad to see this 'ere. 'Tis his rapier. I'll get 'un cleaned up."

William rolled away.

"William, my dear Rutherford," said Dicon, "regards both Jeremy and myself with a—er—fatherly concern. I fear the feminine influence does not commend itself to him."

*

*

*

For two days Jeremy Wainwright remained in the dark places where life and death ever struggle for man's body. Jennifer Rutherford would not leave his side. Naught could persuade her.

"He will open his eyes and I would be with him," was all she would answer.

So it happened. Jeremy opened his eyes and Jennifer Rutherford was beside him. And when he closed them again it was only to sleep the sleep of healing and rest. From then on Jeremy grew steadily stronger.

Jennifer, gay beyond all expression, full of gratitude for Jeremy's recovery, talked to him of the promises he had made her when in Barbados. They were to ride together in Devon lanes and to lure trout from Devon streams; and she recalled that he too had promised he would tell her something of the ways of ships and the sea.

'The Anne' sailed on homeward bound, and

on either side of her sailed two vessels—a merchant vessel and the privateer, manned by a crew from 'The Anne'. To the seamen they were a brave and comforting sight : rich prizes indeed.

They found it pleasing to contemplate the ways of spending their share of the prize money : not forgetting their wives and sweethearts. The womenfolk in North Devon would, before so very long, surely be tricked out in gorgeous finery come high days and holidays.

Dicon and Elspeth talked of the future with glad hopes, whilst Martha Hunkin fussed around and mothered all who would allow her, particularly William Gammon, when Mister Rutherford gave her the opportunity. For Mister Rutherford invariably sought out William with whom to converse and pass the sailing time away.

" I tell you, William—and I'll brook no denial—no finer couple can be found in all England. Jennifer and Jeremy, William, names so pleasingly alliterative : tripping so smoothly over the tongue. Of course, as I have ever maintained, their meeting was ordained. Twice that lad has saved my daughter's life. There's the proof, William. Ordained ! Never a doubt of it. Most satisfactory ! Most comforting ! "

" Aye, Mister Rutherford, Sir. Proper youngsters they be. Never seen a properer pair. Come to think on it, 'twas me as taught 'im to wrestle, though 'twas Mister Dicon as taught 'im sword-

play. ~~Not~~, mark y', Mister Rutherford, Sir, as I places me trust in they tiddly little swords : give me a cutlash. That be a man's weapon.

" 'Owsoever, there 'be naught like wrestlin'. Now that there bear ! Never was there such a gigantical critter ! Now there was me and there was the bear."

" Exactly, William," interposed Mister Rutherford, " a most alarming sight it must have been. But, as I was about to say : it is remarkable how these two young people were brought together and, think upon this, William, all because the lad was wrongly condemned as a traitor—ordained, William, ordained ! "

" Aye, so 'twas," agreed William. " Must 'a' been. Same as I was brought up to wrestle. 'Twas ordained sure enough or I 'udn't be 'ere a-tellin' the tale. There was the bear and me with no weapon whatsoever. So what does I do ? I'll tell 'ee, Mister Rutherford, Sir. I'll tell 'ee.

" There's only one chance : the flying mare !

" So I slips in under the old bear's arms and I gets me grip and I puts out all me strength. Up 'e goes . . . down 'e comes, wallop and . . . "

" Ah, yes, to be sure, William, and talking about mares that reminds me. My daughter will be going riding with Jeremy when they reach England. I must buy her a couple of good mounts, aye, and a couple for Jeremy. Treat 'em both the same. A fine lad !

"When you become the father of a daughter, William, you will realise the necessity of considering her future: particularly to whom you will entrust her happiness."

"Just as you say, Mister Rutherford, Sir. Well, as I was tellin', over goes the bear, the wind knocked clean out of 'im, and I thinks to meself what a proper rug it 'ud make for to put afore the fire, specially on a winter night, when . . ."

"Certainly, William. It is right and proper to think about homemaking. Now when a father thinks about his daughter's future home . . ."

And, with a fair and following wind, three vessels sailed serenely eastwards:

Homeward Bound!

